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a Snow White Werewolf tale

THE COMPLETE SERIES

NEW YORK TIMES and USA TODAY Bestselling Author

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KRISTIN MILLER

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KRISTIN MILLER



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THE COMPLETE
SERIES

KRISTIN MILLER

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SNOW WHITE'S SEDUCTION

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To Justin

*I did it! I took the dare and managed to fit those two
disgustingly hilarious words in a book. Took me long enough,
right?*

Chapter One

SNOW

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST
WHITE WOLF PACK

“Mirror, mirror on the wall,” I pray, staring at my reflection, “please don’t let Malcolm’s dick be small.”

Of all the things that could be wrong with him, this is the only thing on my mind. The teensy-tiny little smidgeon of uncertainty niggling at the back of my brain. Because come on, there has to be something wrong with Malcolm Taylor, wildly successful CEO of Taylor’s Jewelry in New York City. Nobody is intelligent, hardworking, witty, *and* swinging a club between the legs.

He’s a total Hemsworth to boot, or so he seems from the pictures. Just under six feet tall, dirty-blond hair that tickles his broad shoulders, tapered waist, muscles for days—more than enough to sweep me off my feet—and dreamy blue eyes.

Does he have a sixth toe? A nasty scar? I’ll gladly accept

both of those things and so much more.

"But for the love of God," I say aloud before spreading ruby-red gloss across my lips, "please don't let him be packing peanuts below the belt."

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that," my stepmother says from behind me, drawing me around. Although she's only in her mid-forties, the silvery-white hair pulled back from her narrow face, and the stress lines etched around her eyes make her appear twenty years older. She's holding out a glass filled with a lime-green alcohol. "I brought this to loosen your nerves."

I frown, staring at the martini glass. "What is it?"

"Tonight's special." As her lips curl into a sinister smile, I notice that she's painted them dark burgundy. It reminds me of the shade of blood. "It's an appletini. Made just for you."

"Thanks." I take the drink and sip carefully. It's mostly vodka, with a hint of sweetness. Perfection. "I don't like these parties. Never have. Too many people."

"I know." My stepmother folds her arms over her chest, giving off a vibe of icy indifference. "But tonight, it's paramount that you put your best foot forward. I've just received word that Malcolm Taylor has arrived."

"Already?" The breath catches in my throat. "He's early."

"I thought you'd be pleased. You've had a crush on him forever. I see the way you stare at pictures of him in the White Wolf Pack Newsletter."

"Oh, I'm excited to finally meet him in person." And I'll be sure to ogle his pictures in private from now on. "But I'm nervous, too."

Because I've built him up in my head as the perfect guy. We've never met, but beyond his stunning good looks, I hear he's kind and thoughtful, with a sense of humor that'll have you rolling every day. As a member of our pack, he's reached borderline celebrity status. It's too bad his work in New York

City keeps him from attending our full moon festivities.

This weekend, though, is special.

Every werewolf in the pack must be here, including him. Sunday is my twenty-fifth birthday, which means I'm carrying on the tradition of my maternal line. I'll become Alpha of the pack and rule the wolves in our care.

And he'll be here to see it.

My heart races at the thought. "You must take tonight seriously," my stepmother goes on, her voice grave. "You know how dire our situation has become."

Sighing heavily, I toss back a stiff drink. "You don't have to remind me."

Each month during the phase of the full moon, we close down the luxurious White Estate and open it to the werewolves in our pack. We party for three days straight, with dinners, dances, and an induction ceremony on the final day. Any other weekend, our estate is a top-notch bed and breakfast for non-shifters. We offer all kinds of outdoor activities for those who wish to escape city life. During the full moon, though, on a weekend like this one, our estate is a shifting sanctuary, a place where we can be ourselves, giving in to our primal urges.

But behind closed doors, our estate is in trouble. Expenses are high, and the income is lower than it's been in five years, ever since my dad passed away. We've applied for loans, ones that would allow us to remodel and hopefully get back on our feet, but we've been denied time and time again.

"Lucky for us, the solution to all of our problems is right here, staring at me with wide, innocent eyes." My stepmother pinches my chin in her bony fingers and squeezes too tightly. "Once Malcolm Taylor falls head over heels in love with you, we'll be set. Our future will be brighter than either of us could have ever dreamed."

The diamonds on her fingers gleam brightly—the rock on

her middle finger is new. It seems as if she's always exchanging smaller gems for larger, plain cars for more luxurious. No wonder we're in such dire financial straits. It's the spending that's gotten out of control. We should be cutting down to basics, not using more than we have. Not that I could ever point those things out to her.

After this weekend, when I've become Alpha and she's no longer my advisor, I'd like to think I could change things and improve this place. But I've seen the amount of debt we're in, and it's downright oppressive.

"It should be easy to get him under your spell," she goes on before I can respond, "someone with your flawless beauty."

I lean away from her touch. "You make it sound simple. Walk up to him, introduce myself, and—*bam*. He's in love. Doesn't work that way, Stepmother."

Though, damn, I wish it did. I've been thinking and dreaming of him for longer than I care to admit.

"Oh, my dear..." She shakes her head as if she pities me. "He's a hot-blooded, unmated werewolf. Of course that's the way it works."

Okay, I must be stupid. Or naive. But I've met countless men who didn't fall in love with me after a simple introduction and handshake. Maybe I've been going about things the wrong way.

"You'll go downstairs and catch his attention," she continues, eyeing me carefully. "You'll seduce him. Convince him he can't live without you. Before long, there'll be wedding bells, and we will be partners in the largest jewelry company in the country. Doesn't sound difficult."

It sounds manipulative. Borderline evil.

"Oh, of course." I laugh nervously. "Seduce him—*trick him*, you mean. I'm not going to buy our way out of debt with sex. I don't care how big of a co—*rock*," I correct, blushing, "he can promise me."

She laughs, a malicious sound that pricks my ears. “I’m not asking you to sleep with Malcolm Taylor against your will. Though, if his balls were in *my* court, I’d —”

“No, Stepmother...” I turn a cough into a laugh. “You mean if *the* ball was in your court. Not *his* balls.”

She waves me away. “Don’t twist words on me. You know what I mean. I’d do *anything* to save our estate.”

“Maybe I’m misunderstanding,” I say quietly, “but it sounds like you’re telling me to deceive him, sleep with him, and then marry him for his money so we avoid foreclosure.”

Her narrow face remains stoic, though truth twinkles in her dark eyes. “That’s not what I’m saying at all.”

“Then what?”

Slowly, she pulls down the masquerade mask I’d lifted onto my forehead. It’s made of silver sequins with red feathers flaring over the top, matching the colors in my mermaid-fit dress perfectly.

“Malcolm Taylor is a catch, Snow, and he’s here, in your home. This is your chance to get to know him, get closer to him. What harm would it do if you went downstairs, put on your sweetest smile, and tried to capture his attention? You never know—you just might hit it off and live happily ever after.”

“Things never go that smoothly for me.” I down the last of my appletini. “Especially not in that department.”

“Think positive, my dear.” My stepmother turns, her black dress flaring around her ankles as she walks toward the tower in the west wing. “He’ll be the one in a midnight-blue tux.”

“I’m sure there will be lots of men in blue,” I call out.

She cranes around and glares over her shoulder. “The one with the women draped all over him, then.”

Well, she’s right there. I don’t have to be downstairs to know that half of the estate is filled with women who want to get into his pants. When we received confirmation that

he'd be attending this weekend, the reservation department telephone rang off the hook with women wondering what room he'd be staying in, and asking if they could reserve the room closest. It was madness.

As I adjust my dress in the mirror, tugging on the top to make sure the heart-shaped drop covers my breasts, I give myself a mental pep talk.

I'm not doing this for my stepmother, or the promise of marriage to a guy who'll save our estate from foreclosure. I'm doing this for me. Because I have to meet Malcolm Taylor. If I don't take advantage of the opportunity in front of me this weekend, I'll lose the best chance I've ever had. He'll go back to New York, and I'll most likely never see him again. I'll always wonder "what if."

Sighing heavily, I push the worry from my mind. "Here goes nothing."

The party is hopping. In the kitchen, the staff hustles to arrange food on silver serving trays. Packmates lounge on every chair, couch, and barstool in the living room. They hover near the bar in the dining room, meeting up with friends, and flirting with strangers. Women are decked out in formal gowns, elegant masks covering the top parts of their faces. Men are dressed in tuxedos with matching black and white masks. Crystal chandeliers hang from the vaulted ceiling above, casting colorful slivers of light around the room.

It's very *Phantom of the Opera*. With wolves. And liquor.

Ghosting my hand over the banister, I traipse down the stairs slowly, using my vantage point high above to locate Malcolm.

Doesn't take long.

He's *there*. Just as my stepmother said he would be, he's lost in a sea of estrogen. The midnight-blue pinstripe suit fits him perfectly, accenting the breadth of his shoulders, the swell of his chest muscles, and the lean lines of his waist. He's

wearing a rose on his lapel, too.

A true romantic.

As the brunette on his right laughs at something he said, she smacks him in the arm. But for no reason, his attention snaps to me. I can't see his eyes behind the black mask, but I can feel their intensity as he sizes me up. Chills scatter over my body, spreading liquid heat from my chest down to the juncture between my legs.

The photos I've seen haven't done Malcolm justice. Shadow of stubble on his wide jaw. Thick arms. Big hands clasped in front of his groin. Oh yeah—I take an extra generous glance at the impressive pitch in his pants. He's batting with something long and strong.

I feel cool and composed—so not like me—as I take the final step onto the glossy great room floor. And slip.

Fuuuu—it's too late for curse words.

My foot shoots out from under me. I squeal, clutching the railing as if my life depends on it.

A strong hand grips my elbow and helps me upright before I hit the floor.

“Thank you so much.” Brushing strands of raven-black hair from in front of my mask, I look up—right into the gorgeous face of Mr. Sexy Pinstripe. “Oh shit. It's you.”

He chuckles and grins slowly. Two dimples prick the corners of his cheeks. Funny, but I don't remember seeing dimples in the pictures. I would've remembered that cuteness. It's off the charts.

“It's me,” he parrots, glancing at my shoes. “First time wearing heels?”

“No, but you'd think so, wouldn't you?” I free my elbow from his grip, but my arm is still warm and tingling where he touched me. “Maybe I should ditch them.”

“I think you're radiant, with or without them.” He leans in close, just over my shoulder, his breath coating my ear. “But

keeping the heels *on* is always fun.”

Shivers roll through me, but I repress a shudder so he won't see the effect he has on me. No wonder this guy has every woman in the pack eating out of the palm of his hand. Two seconds and *I'm* the one under *his* spell instead of the other way around.

“How 'bout a drink?” he asks.

Nodding slowly, I glance over his shoulder. The gaggle of women he'd just left is glaring, narrowing their eyes and whispering about me. I can hear every word with my sensitive hearing, and none of it's good.

“That would be great,” I say finally, and let him lead me toward the bar.

I order a second appletini—can't get enough of the sweetness—and Malcolm orders a Guinness. There's only one open stool at the bar. He guides me back, step by step, until I have no choice but to sit on it, and then he stands in front of me, his thigh brushing my knee.

“You're different,” he says, eyeing me carefully, tipping back his drink.

I frown. He must mean different from what my stepmother told him. “Good different?”

“Yeah.” He nods slowly, taking me in, from my halo of black hair, to the mask hiding my eyes, to my lips. “Definitely good.”

I don't know how he does it, but time seems to stop around him. We order a second and third drink, and talk for an hour about absolutely nothing at all—not about the pack, not about our families—and it's wonderful. He's a Seahawks fan like I am, even though he lives in Giants territory, which is strange. But I don't question it. He's spent the last five years traveling the world trying to build up his business, though he doesn't dwell on the details of it. In fact, he doesn't mention jewelry at all, and I'm careful not to be the first to bring it up.

By the time I'm three—or is it four?—drinks down, my brain is a little fuzzy. I'm not sure who started touching who first, but I'm pretty sure his hand has been on my thigh for the last half hour. And I want him to leave it there. No, scratch that. I want his hand to move up my thigh, sweep between my legs, and continue up, up, up, until his fingers reach home.

"Want to get out of here?" I hear myself ask, and I'm not even sure where the boldness comes from. I'm not normally this forward, but something about Malcolm is bringing it out in me. I'm relaxed and calm and feel like I've known him my whole life. "Somewhere...private?"

"Sure thing, gorgeous." He leans over to whisper in my ear. "Lead the way."

Hell, to the yes. I haven't been able to think about anything else since I met him.

It might be the alcohol taking over my body, but I snatch his hand off his lap and drag him through the great hall, past packmates and staff, and head toward the back door. But as we turn into the massive, industrial-sized kitchen, I glance over my shoulder. He grins, revealing those adorable dimples. And I lose my mind.

Spinning around, I snatch the lapels of his coat in my fists and haul him against me, crushing my mouth to his. Bursts of sensation explode inside me as he takes my face in my hands and tilts, deepening the kiss. On a groan, he presses against me, his hips against my hips, something long and hard against my stomach.

I moan into him, into the raw, scorching heat of him as I lean my head back and let him feast on my neck.

"Snow," he says, licking a slow line from my jawbone down to the heart of my neck. "You taste like apples, sweet and juicy."

"Oh God—yes."

I don't know if I'm buzzed or sex-drunk, but the world

swims in front of my eyes, and I can't help but wrap my leg around his hips to draw him closer, then closer still. My eyes flutter closed as he ropes his hand around my leg to keep it there and then claims my mouth with fevered kisses.

Voices sound from the direction we just came.

"Someone's coming," I whisper against his lips. "We should stop."

He rips his mouth from mine on a hiss. "Hell no."

Jerking open the door to my left—a coat closet for the kitchen staff—he guides me inside, slamming it behind him. A laugh bubbles out of me, but he kisses me quiet, slipping his tongue past my lips. Voices hit my ears. The packmates out there are laughing hysterically as they scrounge through the kitchen for more booze.

We're clear.

"You're so fucking hot," he whispers, pushing me against the wall. His hands are on my breasts, cupping their full weight, and his mouth is on mine, possessive and hungry, seeking out every dark, wet corner. "Always have been, but now..."

Always have been? In the short time I've known him? He's not making sense, but whatever. I crave the weight of his body as I've never hungered for anything in my life. I want him—need him. He tastes like warmth and spice, infused with the creaminess of his beer. Absolutely mouthwatering.

"Do you hear them out there?" he whispers, his voice so low I can barely hear it. "Do you want to open the door and let them watch what I'm going to do to you?"

Oh God.

The idea of having someone watch me make out with someone else has never been exciting before, but now, with Malcolm, I want whatever he wants. Even if that means kicking that door down so the whole estate can see him pleasure me.

Or maybe that's the appletinis talking.

“You do, don’t you?” He wrenches my gown up over my waist, and then his hand is between my legs, his fingers ghosting over my thigh. “Do you want to feel my finger inside you? Stretching you? Pounding in and out of your pussy?”

Blood lurches through my veins, heavy and laden with desire. I arch back, open up, giving him everything, all of me, as he nibbles on my lower lip. Currents of white-hot electricity scorch my skin and shoot between my legs.

“Yes.” My voice is a strained whisper, barely audible. “I want...everything.”

“You’re wet for me.” His voice is a gravelly rasp, and as he sweeps his fingers through my folds, he lets out a sound that’s part whimper, part groan. It’s near silent, meant only for my ears. “You’re bare. I wasn’t expecting...”

As his voice goes hoarse, he drives a finger inside my heat. I sag against the wall, speared with lust and pleasure, the blackness of the closet pulsing before my eyes. Sucking on my lower lip, he curls his finger inside me, drawing the edge of release closer.

He plunges his tongue into my mouth, kneads my breast with one hand, and swirls his finger over my clit with the other. I’m a live wire, moving against his hand, widening my stance to give him easier access, biting his lower lip.

That earns me a low throaty moan of approval.

So, I do it again. And again. Until he’s moving against me, too, grinding his hips as he plunges his tongue inside my mouth and his finger inside my core. Working me, possessing me, he buries his head in my breasts.

Between the feel of his mouth and his hand, the orgasm closes in, and then explodes inside me, sending pulses of ecstasy rolling through my entire body. I bite back a scream, bucking and writhing against him until the orgasm releases its grip on me.

“They missed out on a good show.” He kisses me deep.

Hard. "It's not too late. I'm just getting started."

The next moments happen in such a blur, they're a clusterfuck of rippling sensation. His hands are in my hair, his tongue in my throat, the thick bulge in his pants pressing against my stomach, his mask brushing against my cheek.

"Malcolm," I breathe, gripping his shoulders.

He stops for a moment, shoots me a smile, and then dives back in for another kiss. "Whatever you want to call me, baby, I'm cool with it."

His hands are on my ass, kneading my flesh, his face in my hair as he moves his hips against me. God, he's going to be a great lover.

"Wait..." The clouds of confusion part in my brain, leaving me confused. "What'd you just say?"

He smudges a line of kisses down my neck and closes his mouth around my nipple. Closing my eyes, I relish the heat of his touch as his fingers work on my clit again. He's on his knees before I can think through the thought, tugging on my dress, shoving it up to my hips, and propping my leg over his shoulder. And then his mouth is on my pleasure spot, hot and delicious, and he's lapping me up.

"I don't usually talk with my mouth full," he teases, licking and swirling his tongue over my clit. I tremble, clutch at his hair, and suppress a moan. "If you want to call me Malcolm..." Another slow drag through my heat. More shudders blooming over my spine. "I'm cool with it."

As he consumes me, kisses me open-mouthed, and licks in slow circles, the second orgasm rips through me, setting fire to my skin and burning me with pleasure.

"I'm confused." When the orgasm finally subsides, I drag my fingers into his hair and force an all-stop. "Isn't that the name everyone calls you?"

"No," he says slowly, drawing out the word as he meets my eyes from his position at my feet. "I'm Hunter."

“Hunter?”

“As in...” My best friend from childhood who moved away five years ago, right about the time my father died. I cover my mouth with my hand as reality smacks me upside the head. *“Hunter?”*

He slinks up my body and coils his arms around my waist. “One and only.”

“Oh no, no, no.” I cover my mouth with my hand and jerk my gown into its proper place. “You were supposed to be—and we just—and you were—”

“About to fuck your brains out.”

Chapter Two

SNOW

My thoughts are tangled in a post-orgasm web of some kind, and they just won't come together. At least not in any way that makes sense.

"What are you doing here?" It's the only thing I can think to ask.

"In the closet?" He grins, and those dimples become all-too familiar. No wonder I didn't recall seeing those in any of Malcolm's pictures. "Technically I pushed you in here, but you asked if I wanted to go somewhere private."

"No." I put a hand to my head. It's starting to throb fiercely. "I mean, no one could find you to tell you about this weekend. We heard you were off the map, finalizing a business deal in the Alps or something—it doesn't even matter. Why would you pretend to be Malcolm? I asked if you were him."

The bliss that'd been sailing through my body before has been completely replaced with panic and fear. If Hunter said anything—one word to the wrong person—Malcolm would

never give me a second thought.

“Actually,” Hunter says, replacing strands of loose hair behind my ear, “you said, ‘it’s you’ and I agreed. I thought you knew it was me. That you’d recognized me from before. Besides, you didn’t seem like you cared who it was a few seconds ago. Hell, another couple minutes and you might’ve been shouting the Dali Lama’s name.”

I smack him in the shoulder. “Don’t bring an innocent religious man into your lies.”

“I didn’t lie. You mistook me for Malcolm Taylor, apparently. Have to say, after talking with the tool for a few minutes this evening, you made out better with me.”

“I—” Can’t even argue against what he said. I don’t know Malcolm or how he pleasures the women in his arms, but I know Hunter just took me to heaven twice in the span of thirty minutes. “You were wearing blue...”

He removes his mask and glances down nonchalantly. “It’s my favorite tux.”

“An—and the women?”

He laughs. “What women?”

“The ones—she said—never mind. I don’t know why I thought you were him. It was my mistake.”

He takes a giant step back as if I’ve struck him again. “Are you and Malcolm a thing?”

“No—yes.” Sweat beads on my forehead as embarrassment sets in. “I don’t know yet, but I like him. It’s twisted.”

“Then don’t let me stop you from straightening it out.”

Adjusting his pants, Hunter pushes the door open and moves aside as I charge into the kitchen and check for our voyeurs. They’re gone. Snatching up the bottom of my gown, I head toward the door, back to the party.

“Hey, Snow,” Hunter calls.

I turn back. He’s leaning against the closet door, suit jacket slung over his shoulder, a satisfied grin on his handsome face.

“What?”

“The whole crew will be at the lodge later—all seven of us. You should come by later. It’ll be just like the old days.”

Just like that, flashes of the past with Hunter and his friends strike me. Midnight bonfires. Sneaking around the estate gardens. Truth or dare as wolves under a full moon. Teenage stuff. Of the group, Hunter and I were always closest. We talked about boyfriends and girlfriends and laughed at the stupid things we did. He saw the real me when everyone else was too scared to get close because I was in line to be the next Alpha. He was my best friend. My only friend, really. He supported me through the grief of losing my mother, and then my father years later. He gave me a shoulder to cry on and arms to hold me when the nights seemed too long to bear. We were friends. Totally platonic. We didn’t come close to jumping out of the no-fuck friend zone. He was always a serial flirt, but it’s in his nature. Seducing women always came as instinctively to him as breathing.

“If you want to finish what we started in here.” He raps on the door with his elbow. “You know where to find me.”

“Don’t count on it.”

Yet even as I say the words, I’m tracing the route in my head, from the estate to his lodge. My lips are tingling, my body numb from alcohol and orgasms, and my mind blank as the blankest slate of blanks, so I stick my tongue out at him before pushing through the door and returning to the party.

“You have to be here somewhere,” I mumble to myself, snatching a champagne flute off the tray of a passing server. “It’s like Where’s Waldo of the werewolf world in here. Where the hell is that blue suit?”

I weave through the crowd, scanning masks, suits, and women laughing hysterically. The crowd parts, and there he is, out of nowhere. Blue suit—no pinstripes—and a white mask freckled with green spots. He’s got a woman on each arm—

gorgeous Jessica Rabbit types—in purple, sparkly gowns with sky-high slits that nearly show their hoo-hahs. Impossibly-perky breasts. Legs for days. Silky red masks and pouts that make *me* want to pucker up for a kiss.

Taking a deep breath, I pretend I didn't emerge from a coat closet with another guy a few moments ago, and traipse over to his side. I channel the vixen I'd been coming down the stairs earlier, smooth and regal.

The woman on Malcolm's right arm tugs him close and whispers something in his ear. His gaze slides to mine, and he laughs.

Couldn't be laughing at me.

But it's hard not to think it.

"Malcolm Taylor?" I say, blushing as I extend my hand and meet his gaze. "It's a pleasure to have you visiting our estate this weekend."

"Thank you." A genuine smile lights his handsome face as he shakes my hand. His grip is firm, his hand soft. "Everything's been wonderful so far."

The brunette on his left snuggles up to him, and I will my lip to stop curling.

"I'm glad to hear it." My heart pounds as words escape me. It wasn't this difficult talking to Hunter when I thought he was Malcolm. Why now, when I'm talking to the real deal, does it feel I'm pulling teeth to make small talk? Maybe it's my nerves. *Don't think. Push through.* "If you need anything—if there's something we—I can do for you, please don't hesitate to ask. Anything at all."

There. Take that sexual innuendo and suck it.

"Actually, there is something I'd like to talk to you about privately," he says, stepping forward to take me by the elbow.

Now we're talking.

I can't help but smile as he guides me toward the bar. I've won. Captured his attention in a room full of beauties. Now, all

we have to do is talk for a while, see if we're compatible, and who knows? Maybe there will be a happily-ever-after in my future. Malcolm Taylor has every quality I've ever wanted in a man. And he has the ability to save the estate—the property my father built from the ground up.

"Listen," Malcolm says, turning to me before we reach the bar, "I'm so glad you approached me just now."

"Oh?"

Was he waiting for me? Bored with the bimbo squad and counting the minutes until a real woman caught his attention? I'm bursting out of my skin.

I bat my lashes coyly, but my top lid sticks to my bottom. I have to use my fingers to pull them apart. By the time I meet Malcolm's gaze again, he's checking the time on his phone.

He exhales heavily. "I wanted to ask you—"

"Yes?" I interrupt, leaping out of my skin.

Frowning as if he's confused, Malcolm swipes his fingers over his lips and leans close. He's going to kiss me. I know it. I turn, trying to rub my cheek on his. But he pulls away and says, "The bathroom in my suite is busted."

My expectations went down the toilet with a big, fat *whoosh*.

"Excuse me?"

"My toilet," he whispers, leaning close once more. "The handle is missing and I can't flush. I called the customer service number next to the phone in my room, but no one answered. I left a message but haven't heard back. Who should I talk to about fixing the issue or switching rooms?"

"*This*"—I bite back a nervous laugh—"is what you wanted to talk to me about?"

"You work here, don't you?"

"Ah, I see why you might think that." I nod, my gaze lowering to my shoes. Total misunderstanding. And totally humiliating to boot. Blood heats my cheeks and promises to

burn them through. “I’m Snow White. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“I’m terribly sorry, but when you said *our* estate—and the way you greeted me, so nervous and sweet—I assumed you were one of the workers.”

Nervous and sweet.

Not the seductress my stepmother wanted me to be. Not the one I was with Hunter back there.

“It’s not a problem. I’ll get the toilet looked after right away.” *Disaster.* The T-word should *never* be used on a date. “I think the only thing that might save his awkward situation is a shot. What do you say?”

“I’m sorry, sweetheart.” He pats me on the shoulder and smiles. “It’s a great idea, but I don’t think so.”

I eye his hand where it’s squeezing my shoulder. Something about this scenario is wrong. *All* wrong. The dynamic is off-kilter. Toilet talk? Calling me sweetheart? And what’s with the childish shoulder pat?

“I should get back to my dates,” he says. “Wouldn’t want to leave those beauties waiting too long.”

As he turns and marches away from me, I’m left feeling cold and hollow.

Those beauties.

I’m clearly not one of them. Not worth the billionaire’s time. Unless I’m fixing his toilet, that is. My stepmother’s words ring through my ears: *You’ll seduce him. Convince him he can’t live without you.*

I won’t be doing either of those things. Not this way. I just blew the only chance I had with him, and I’m standing here, watching him walk away. The guy I’ve been picturing as my future husband. •

“Wait,” I call out, turning him back around. I curl my finger for him to come closer. He narrows his eyes as he marches near. “If you don’t want a drink at the bar, how about

I come up to your room with one later?"

Smooth. The way I should've been from the start. I don't plan on sleeping with the guy, but some alone time to talk without everyone watching would be golden, and a perfect opportunity to get to know him.

"All right." His tone is crisp. Tight. "Room 302. Midnight."

Butterflies flutter through me as I mentally high-five myself. I've done it. Convinced a mogul to let me into his bedroom. Well, as long as he doesn't plan on asking me to jury-rig his john.

As he returns to the bimbo squad, he turns and shoots me the brightest grin. At his side, the women smile effortlessly, their locks of silky-smooth hair flowing around their shoulders as they drape their bodies over him like a cloak. I'm not like them—if they're what Malcolm is looking for, I'm screwed. I may've secured an invitation into his private quarters, but I'm no seductress. I can't move like those vixens. My mouth doesn't part seductively like that, slow and sensual, and my eyes don't stay closed in that sexy, heavy-lidded way.

It's not in me.

But I know one irresistible playboy—a guy who gets anything, and anyone he wants—who could help me out with that part.

Chapter Three

HUNTER

Damn, I've missed this place.

It feels good to be back, even if it's only for the weekend. I've had renters in my cabin for the last five years, but somehow it has the same vibe as it did before. It feels like home, warm and filled with so many memories. Back in the day, we partied hard, and this place—situated in the forest outside of the estate's grounds—was our sanctuary. The land and cabin are mine, and don't belong to the White family, but Snow visited so regularly, she might as well have lived here. Especially after her parents passed.

Although I haven't been back since the day I left, I've thought about this weekend for years—the one where Snow turns twenty-five and takes over the pack. I swore to her father I'd return, and give her something on the day she's declared Alpha.

I'm not staying long. I can't. I'm due back in Iceland on Tuesday. The developers are already on site and waiting for

me to show up and finalize the details of the new resort in person.

Once I fulfill this order from my former Alpha, I'm leaving.

I expected Snow to be at the party tonight, but I never expected her to come at me the way she did. It was sexy as hell, hardening me to steel from the moment she dragged me away from the others.

I can't even remember any of the women's names.

Strange. Usually I can recall a few.

But now, with the taste of Snow's arousal lingering on my tongue, and the memory of her breasts etched on my palms, I can't think about anything else. Who would've guessed that little Snow White was going to be the most beautiful woman at the party?

Certainly not me.

She was always the adorable girl from the estate who could make me smile effortlessly. Now, not only does she still have her cute, wide-eyed appeal, but she's hot as hell. The curve of her hips, the full swell of her breasts, and her silken folds as they opened for me are sex personified.

I'm barely finished unpacking my things when the front door bursts open and Snow rushes in, her cheeks pale and windblown, her black hair swept back from her face.

Elation whips through me, but I keep my libido in check before I tackle her to the ground and fuck her with finesse, right on the floor.

"Didn't think I'd see you again tonight." I can't help but smile. "Malcolm turn out to be a two-second Sam?"

"What? No." After doing a quick scan of the lodge, Snow heads straight for the fridge, snatches a Guinness, pops the top, and downs half in one swig. I try not to gawk, but damn. She's frantic, eyes pinched closed as she clutches the bottle like she's hanging on for dear life.

“Everything all right?” I hold back a laugh. “Want to sit down?”

Shaking her head, she detaches one hand from the bottle, holds up her finger to signal “one more minute,” only to dive in again. As she hits the bottom, she sighs, slams the bottle on the counter, and meets my eyes.

“Do you think I’m sexy?” she fires.

I flinch, but not because I don’t want to answer the question. It simply caught me off guard. “Considering the game of Clitar Hero we played in the closet, I’d say hell yeah. You’re a babe.”

It’s the truth. And it’s one of the things I always appreciated about our friendship. We were open and honest, telling it as it was. No pressure. We were able to acknowledge the good looks of the other without it being weird or changing things. Five years later, and we’re picking up where we left off. As if no time has passed at all. Except now, benefits are on the table.

And I can’t wait to go all in.

She blows out a shaky breath. Something is bothering her. Something big. I’d know the pinch in her brow anywhere.

“I feel like I can’t breathe,” she says, holding her stomach. “Is it hot in here?”

I’d wager it’s hot in any room she steps in.

“Let’s head outside.” I grab two beers, wrap my arm around her shoulder, and lead her onto the porch. “Fresh air will do you good.”

Stealing the beer from my hand, she settles on the edge of the porch bench, her red dress flaring out beneath her. She brushes a hand over her thigh and studies the wooden deck planks, the forest beyond the lodge, the full moon shining overhead. And then she gulps down another drink.

“Where have you been all these years?” she snaps. “Are you back for good? I mean, are you staying, or are you leaving

after the ceremony?"

"Rapid Fire. All right." I nod slowly. "I've been traveling the world from ski lodge to ski lodge. Buying ones that were in trouble, fixing them up, and operating them until they're successful. Then I move on to the next. I've been chasing adventure from Costa Rica to the Himalayas and back again."

"And then?"

"I'm due in Iceland on Tuesday."

"So you're leaving right after the ceremony."

"Pretty much." After I pass along the gift from her father. I ache to give it to her now, but swore to him I would wait. After delaying it five years, what's another two days? "What's bothering you, Snow? Do you really want to know every detail of where I've been for the last few years? Because we can sit out here and bullshit over beers, and I can tell you adventure stories that'll make your head spin. But I don't think that's what you're doing here."

She stares at the forest beyond the porch, killing her drink with a ferocity saved for drunkards.

"Snow, I wouldn't dare to tell you what you should or shouldn't do, but you might want to consider taking it easy. Those are going to hit you hard and—"

"Do you think I could seduce you?" Her cheeks flush pink. "I mean, do you think I'm capable of seducing someone—anyone? Like a bajillionaire, let's say. You know, for argument's sake."

My next swallow of Guinness shoots down the wrong pipe. I choke, her words ringing through my head. "Do you not remember the closet incident? I couldn't keep my hands off you."

And if we weren't talking right now, I'd be climbing all over her. Driving inside her. Pinning her beneath me as she takes every hard inch of me into her heat.

"Yeah, but I'm not talking about your eagerness to grope

a stranger in the closet. That's true to Hunter form."

I frown at her beneath my brow. "How so?"

She tilts her head at me. "Come on. You're a manwhore. You'd play Five Minutes in Heaven with anyone willing."

"Ouch." I plant my hand over my chest. "That hurts."

"It's the truth. Your reputation for being a playboy reached this estate long before you did. Doesn't take much to get your engine revving. And you didn't answer my question." Her voice echoes through the night. "Do you think I'm a seductress? That I could be that person?"

Leaning back on the porch rail, I cross one ankle over the other and take a stiff drink. "Definitely. I think you could seduce anyone you wanted, pompous prick or not."

She narrows her eyes at me over the mouth of her beer as if she doesn't believe what I've just said.

But it's the truth. Now that I've seen her on her best game, I can attest to it. She walked right up to me and caught my attention when I was already drowning in a room full of perfume and estrogen. It's not an easy feat. Before, when we were friends, I'd thought Snow was innocent. Sweet and delicate. And she is. But underneath that prim and proper exterior, she's *burning*.

Someone simply needs to show her how to fan the flames.

While I'm here, I'm happy to step up to the plate.

"What happened with Malcolm Taylor after I left?" The corners of her mouth dip into a frown, and I have the insane urge to lick them upward again. "Aren't you supposed to be trying to get into his pants or something? I mean, if you don't want to use the same closet, I'm sure there are others just as suitable."

She huffs into a sigh and leans back onto the bench. "He called me 'sweetheart.'"

"So what?"

"He patted me on the shoulder."

"Not seeing the problem here." I take a stiff drink. "You weren't expecting him to jump your bones the second you met him, were you?"

"Not expecting, but hoping, maybe." Kinking her neck to the side, she quirks her lips at me. "But then...he asked me to fix his toilet."

"Dude," I spat, disgust recoiling through my stomach, "I've heard of dirty sex games, but that's fucked up."

"No, not like that." She empties her second beer. "He thought I was one of the workers. We didn't start off on the right foot, and because of that, he doesn't see me the right away." She pauses, picking at the label of her beer. "I know the kind of woman he wants: perfectly flowing hair, lush lips, toned in the right places and curvy in others."

I nod decidedly. "Sexy from toes to tits."

"You are so crude. I'm going to pretend I didn't hear you say that." She puts up her hand. "Anyway, I saw the women on his arm tonight. He wants a temptress. A seductress. I think I could really like him, that we might be able to have something great—at least, I thought those things until the toilet incident—but I'm rambling on and on," she says, rolling her eyes. "I hate it when I do this. I simply don't know if he's going to see me as that kind of person—one he wants."

Tension ratcheting up my spine, I kneel in front of her and lift her chin with my fingers. Rather than meet my gaze, she takes another drink. And then another.

"Who cares about this guy, Snow?"

"I do," she blurts, tossing the wrapper to the ground.

"But if you're not his type, why not tell him to piss off and find someone who thinks you're dead sexy?"

"Because he's the perfect guy. I've had my eye on him since he first joined the pack, and I swear there's nothing wrong with him. He's good-looking, hard-working, intelligent, and funny...." She finally levels me with a heated stare. "He's

everything I've ever wanted in a husband. And he told me to meet him in his room at midnight."

"Well, there you have it. He's serving his dick on a platter." I grin at Snow, even as my heart gives an odd clench. I don't want to think about Snow being with Malcolm. He doesn't deserve her. But really, no one does. Ignoring the ache spreading through my chest, I clasp my hands together and slide onto the seat next to her. "Why are you so worried?"

"You know how they say you only have once chance to make a good impression? I might've spoiled mine. If I can, I'd like to change his image of me. I was hoping you would...you know..."

"What?"

"Show me how you do it?"

"How I do what, exactly?"

Her head sways side to side as if she's indecisive and struggling to form words. Or maybe it's the alcohol fuzzing with her head. "Seducing women comes so easily for you. You used to have those raging parties, and the women would come back to the estate talking about nothing but you and your friends. I know you're, like, a Don Juan or something. You drive women crazy and get them eating out of the palm of your hand."

She goes silent, worrying her bottom lip between her teeth. I wait for her to finish, because I can't fathom where she's going with this.

"Well, that's what I want from Malcolm Taylor," she says in a rush. "First, I need to know if he's as great as I think he is. And then, if I'm right, I need to know how to drive him crazy. I want to stand out among his non-stop lineup of bimbos, and you're the only one who can help me. You've got a gift, Hunter. And I want you to give it to me."

The blood drains from my face.

Give it to me.

Four words my johnson loves to hear.

"You want me to tell you how to seduce him?" I ask, clarifying, to be certain this is truly what she wants.

"No," she whispers. "I want you to show me."

"Why me?"

She sighs. "Because I'm comfortable with you. It's not weird touching you or anything, and after what happened in the closet, I know I could learn a lot from you. You're good. *Really* good, actually."

Blood rushes hot in my ears. "Why, thank you, I—"

"But that's not the main reason," she blurts, interrupting me. "It has to be you because you're *leaving* after this weekend. It won't be awkward between us later when I'm with Malcolm and we have to see you around every full moon."

Realization cracks through me like a whip. "That's why you were so eager to find out when I was leaving."

She nods quickly. "What do you say, master of seduction? Will you show me what I need to know?"

Never thought I'd hear those words come out of her mouth.

"Please don't call me master. I'm not about to dive into a Dom role with you." Not that I wouldn't, because that kind of sex is fun as hell, but that'll come later. It's baby steps with Snow. If she wants to nail Malcolm, she'll have to work on a few things before we get there. "If we're doing this, there's no alcohol involved."

"What?" She clutches the near-empty bottle to her chest. "I don't know that I'm brave enough to handle this without it."

"Then you aren't ready," I say simply. "If you're going to do this, your head has to be clear. Seduction isn't about getting plastered so that your inhibitions take a hike and you feel as if you can do whatever you normally wouldn't. It's not about that at all. Seduction is an art. You have to be the one

in control, the one making the rules, and you can't do that if you're drunk."

"See, I *knew* you could do this." Eyes wide, Snow slides to the edge of the seat and sits with her back straight, hands clasped in her lap, like an eager pupil. She's seriously the most adorable woman I've ever seen. "No beer." She hands it over. "I'm listening."

"There are three rules."

"Only three?" Mimicking, she holds up four fingers, and then laughs, sticking out her thumb. "This is going to be much easier than I thought. I was good in school. Do you remember?"

"Yes." Chuckling, I slide closer. "I do."

I remember her schoolgirl outfits through the teenage years, too. Plaid shirts unbuttoned enough to reveal the swell of her breasts. Super-short pleaded skirts. Knee-high stockings. Shiny black heels.

It's enough to kill a man...or fuel his fantasies for the next five years.

"First rule of seduction," I say, turning toward her, brushing my thigh against hers, "is you have to become a physical lure."

"Like in fishing?" Beaming, she pretends to cast out a line and reels it back. "Those silver and red sparkling things were always so pretty, flopping around in the water."

"Yeah, just like fishing. But we're catching Malcolm Taylor, who could have any woman he wants, so it's more complicated. It's not only about dressing up this way, though you look radiant tonight. It's about what's underneath."

"My panties? You know I'm not wearing any."

Oh, holy *hades*. My thoughts tangle around our interlude in the closet and how fucking *hot* that was. Every muscle in my body had been drawn so tight I could've burst through my skin. And when I found her bare—good Lord—I could've

died right there.

"I never wear anything underneath," she says shyly.

"Never?" My mouth goes bone-dry as I grip her thigh. "You—you're always nude? I thought it might've been a one-time thing."

She shrugs her dainty shoulders. "It's more comfortable that way."

I should have guessed Snow would prefer to be comfortable rather than sexy. When we knew each other before, I imagined she wore oversize white granny panties. But now I'm thinking about all the times she's been in the lodge, on my couch, at my table, in my room, and she's been bare—smooth as hell, too—beneath her clothes.

Focus.

My hand burns on her thigh, so I jerk it back. "That's..." *Sexy as fuck. Exactly what Malcolm will want.* "Fine. You'll be—that's great." She's not six inches from me, naked beneath the silky red fabric. *Concentrate, fucker.* "But what I meant was the intention that's underneath everything you do or say. You have to exude an attitude that you really don't care about the object of your desire."

Frowning, she spins toward me completely. "I don't understand."

I don't, either. I've dated my fair share of women, and every single one of them wore underwear, even on the occasions they were begging to go for a ride on my dick. At some point or another, they've tried to please me by mixing up the fabric, but nothing is as erotic as finding a woman bare beneath the jeans. Or gown, as it were.

"If I pretend not to care about Malcolm," she says, "how will he know I like him?"

I could explain it, but showing her would drive the point home. It'd be so much easier. Faster, too.

"You're going to be smooth about it." Just like the slope

of her neck, her cheek. "If I were trying to seduce you, for example, I would make sure there was always space between us, so I wouldn't come off too strong, or too desperate, but I'd find ways to touch you with a seemingly innocent purpose."

She snorts into a laugh. "You mean like the stupid trick where you yawn and then drop your arm over my shoulder?"

"Sort of, but we're not twelve." Guess there's no other way to get her to understand. I'll simply have to show her. *Darn.* "Looks like your hair has come down a bit right there. Let me..." Holding her gaze, I reach out slowly and tuck a strand of raven-black hair behind her ear. It's like silk sliding over my fingers. As I pull my hand away, I make sure to gently brush the tender skin just beneath her ear with my fingertips. *My God*, she's crazy-soft. "If I were trying to seduce you, I would touch you with purpose. Wait, you've got something on your lip..."

"I do?" Her words are slow, as if she's having trouble thinking.

As she reaches for her mouth, I wrap my fingers around her wrist, stopping her. "I'll show you where."

Using her pointer finger, I guide her toward the moisture, and sweep across her lower lip, adding more pressure as I move back and forth. Her lips are luscious and full, her finger grazing against them, and as her mouth drops open into a seductive *O*, I can't help but remember how succulent her lips tasted.

Continuing the lesson, I move in slowly, slant my head the way I would if I were going to claim her mouth, and then I stop a breath away. The air hitches between us. She eyes my lips hungrily, and something inside my gut catches.

"It was a few drops of beer." My voice has gone hoarse, and I can't tear my eyes away from hers. "You got it."

With a knot in my stomach, I bring her finger to my lips and suck it into my mouth. She gasps. The erotic sound hits

my ears with the force of a shotgun, and as I swirl my tongue around her finger, she squirms in her seat.

Doesn't take my heightened werewolf senses to know she's ready for me. And I'm harder than a fucking lightning rod.

Twirling my tongue along the edge of her finger, I give it a solid suck as I massage the palm of her hand. I'm drawing out her enjoyment. Using my mouth and my hands to make her think of the way I could pleasure her body later. Hints of her arousal hit my nose, consuming me.

"Guinness tastes even better secondhand," I force out, after removing her finger from my mouth. Why won't air fill my lungs? What the hell is wrong with me? "Thank you for the sample."

It's what I would say to any woman I was trying to seduce. But to Snow, it sounds lame. Too surface-level. Not romantic enough.

"I want..." She closes her eyes, sways into me a little. Fans of midnight-black lashes arc over her cheek and settle on her alabaster skin. "More than a sample."

This is where I stop. This is where I shoot her a megawatt smile, letting her know I've won, and walk away, leaving her unsatisfied and clawing for more. That's the way it always works.

But I'm moving in, damn it. Closer, closer still. I can't stop. It's like she's got some kind of gravitational pull, and I'm sucked in. It's too late to pull back.

"Fuck me," I whisper, and crush my mouth to hers.

Chapter Four

HUNTER

An explosion of sensation whips through me as her lips mash against mine. They're plush and sweet, and as she lets out a quiet moan of delight, I feast on it, urging her lips apart. She tastes like Guinness and apples and innocence, and as need spikes in my core, I dig my fingers through her hair. Slant her head to deepen the kiss. Feel the luscious curve of her lips open ever-so-slightly. And when her tongue slides against mine, a bomb goes off in my head, obliterating any thought or hesitation that might've been there before.

I'm lost.

Drowning in her scent and heady taste.

Needing to feel more of her, as much as possible, I cup her neck with both hands and stroke my fingers over her petal-soft skin. She whimpers, thrusting her tongue deep into my mouth, exploring, tasting, silently begging for more.

The wolf part of me howls with gripping need.

In one swift move, I coil my arm around her back and lay

her down, all the while feasting on her luscious lips. I want to wedge myself between her legs, grind against her until my erection throbs with the promise of release. Make her come from the friction I know she so desperately wants. But she's got a fucking evening dress on, and it's tight, so unless I strip her down—right here on the porch, my God, wouldn't that be a sight—I can't get between her legs. Bracing my weight on the bench, I settle over the top of her.

As she moans into another kiss, my dick jumps, aching to plunge into her wetness. I'm right there. Ready to tear through her dress.

Desperate to taste more of her, I urge her neck upward with two fingers and pepper kisses down her neck. She's breathing hard, her chest rising and falling in irregular waves. And when I reach the plump curve of her breasts, I groan heavily. Tortured. Pained.

More.

She grips the back of my head and lowers me toward her breasts, giving the permission I crave. She's right there, teetering on the edge of insanity with me.

"Hunter..."

My name on her lips is like a shot of adrenaline. Raw currents of electricity spark through me, unleashing the passion that's coursing through my veins.

"Fuck yeah." My heart pounds against my ribs. "Say my name again—the right one this time."

She's writhing beneath me, panting, chest heaving. "*Hunter.*"

As I jerk down the top of the dress, her breasts bounce free. Full and lush, they're peaked with two of the daintiest pink nipples I've ever seen. She arches back, shoving her breasts into my mouth as a growl erupts from the back of my throat. I knead her double-Ds in my hands, twirl my tongue along her pebbled flesh as the hunger inside me rises to a

violent crest.

If I don't touch more of her, I'll burst.

"Arch up." I kneel at the base of the bench and jerk at her hips, nearly tearing the fabric. "I want to see that beautiful pussy again."

She gives a tiny sigh of approval as she obeys, planting her feet and lifting up.

Fevered, I wrench her dress from the floor and over her thighs, revealing the curve of her milky-white legs. Although I can't see her sex, I know she's going to be warm and wet, and waiting for my touch.

And she's laid out for my taking.

Ghosting my fingers up her legs, I trace a line around her dainty ankles, move up to the arc of her calves, over the mound of her knees, and between her thighs. And when my fingers brush over her silken folds, a groan peels from my lips.

As a teasing smile pulls at the corners of her mouth, she slides a hand between her breasts, down the ruby-red gown bunching on her stomach, and between her legs. Sweeping a finger through her slit, she brings it up to her mouth but doesn't lick the moisture coating it. She's so close, right there, her finger nearly pressed against her lips, taunting me.

Air punches out of my lungs. My heart hitches. I couldn't tear my eyes away from the erotic scene playing out in front of me if my pants were on fire. Her tongue darts out, tantalizingly slow, as she licks her lips and eyes the tip of her finger.

Time. Fucking. Stops.

I don't know this Snow, but my dick thinks he's in love with her.

"I wonder," she says, her voice like a velvet caress on my ears, "if this tastes better secondhand, too."

Oh. My. Fucking. God.

She grins, holding her finger out to me. "Why don't you tell me?"

In a flash of movement, everything blurs. I'm sucking on her finger, and relishing the sweet taste of her cream. I'm on top of her, grinding my erection against her hips. Jerking her finger from my mouth, and kissing her hard. I'm ravaged. Hungry and delirious. I dive into her wetness, teasing her clit and thrusting my finger inside her. And then I add another one. She lets out breathless gasps, and moans of pleasure that fuel my need.

"Hunter, you're going to make me..." She suckles on my lower lip as I drive inside her, thrusting as I would if my dick were stretching her walls instead of my fingers. "Don't stop—oh God..."

I kiss her deeper, harder, working her sex. And when she comes apart, her core clutching around my fingers in tiny little pulses, she screams my name into the night.

The pleasure lighting her face—the pleasure *I* put there—the scent of her arousal, the sound of my name on her sexy mouth...it's all I need. It's everything.

As I pull back and jerk on the button of my jeans, unleashing my throbbing cock, she rakes her fingers over the grooves of my abs.

"Hurry." She's panting, her lips heavy-lidded with desire. "Please, Hunter."

I strip out of my shirt and pants completely, chucking them somewhere behind me. She does the same, shimmying and jerking out of her dress before throwing it over her head.

I have to get inside her.

Scooping her into my arms, she giggles into a squeal. But when I sit on the bench and straddle her legs over my lap, one knee on either side, she quiets, her gaze turning hungry.

There's no need for protection—she can't get pregnant unless she's in heat, which judging by her scent, she's not, and diseases don't pass between werewolves—so I grip my shaft and slowly guide it into her velvety wetness.

“Fuck,” I hiss, drawing out every letter as she moves over the top of me. I fill my hands with her tits, squeeze her nipples between my fingers, and then flick my tongue out over their perfect peaks. “You feel amazing.”

Grinning mischievously, she rocks her hips, lifting and lowering that luscious ass over my groin. Every time our hips meet, I’m speared with lust. My mind is blank, my body on fire, and with each hitch of her breath, each bounce of her breasts and clench of her core, she’s scorching me through.

As sensations gather at the base of my spine, rising and tensing, I press her down over me, her breasts pressed against my chest, our sweat-slickened bodies sliding against one another in perfect time. Kneading her rear in my hands, I speed the tempo, wanting more, needing more, the climax closing in—so close.

“Snow,” I say on a groan, and scrape my hands up her back. Tangling my fingers in her hair, I drag her gaze to mine. The climax erupts from the deepest part of me, and as I fill her with my seed, slamming her hips against mine, delicious warmth flows through me.

Mine.

I’m leveled with the insane desire to claim her as my own and possess her body and soul. But that’s ridiculous. Just because I’ve sexed her twice in the last few hours doesn’t mean I want her to be mine. And she’s trying to get into another dude’s pants.

Clearly my dick doesn’t listen to reason.

“That was exactly what I needed.” She stamps an open-mouthed kiss on my neck. “Consider that lesson learned.”

Right. It *was* a lesson. Nothing more. Damn if it didn’t feel like it, though. ♡

As I’m about to ask what her next move might be, headlights stream across the porch, blinding us.

“Is that—” she starts, covering her breasts. “Did she send

someone for me?"

Disappointment sours my stomach as Diesel's '68 Camaro roars through the driveway, kicking up a cloud of dirt behind his fat tires. A Harley follows the Camaro's path, swerving in a last attempt to pass the classic car. And behind that, the raspy yell of a Porsche motor rattles through the trees.

They're here.

"It's my brothers." Not by blood, but pack. We watch out for each other, and I'd die for any one of them, and I know they'd do the same for me without hesitation. Blood or not, that's what matters in the end. Making sure Snow is covered, I help her dismount and then shove my legs into my pants. "And they're early. For the first time in their lives."

Figures it'd be tonight.

Snow and I were only getting started.

She blows out a shaky breath as she dresses in a rush, covering all of those luscious curves with her gown. "Are they going to be here all night?"

"Snow," I say, still catching my breath, "if you're worried about continuing your lessons, you don't have to be. You're not going to have a problem becoming a seductress."

"I'm glad you think so," she says, standing behind me.

As Diesel, Cash, J.D., and Rocky clamber out of the classic hotrod, she stares, her mouth falling open. Harley dismounts and removes his helmet as Goliath emerges from the Porsche looking irritated for losing the race to the lodge.

"But I still want to learn the other two rules," she says, dancing her fingers up and down my back. "I want you to show me."

"I'm happy to oblige."

It's not like I'll be able to think about anything else.

"What you did to me in the closet — and again just now — I've never felt that way before," she goes on. "I don't know how you did that to me, but I felt...*sexy* for the first time in,

well, ever.”

“You *are* sexy, Snow. More than you know.”

More than *I* knew, actually.

“No. With everyone else, including Malcolm, I’m shy and uptight and definitely not like this. You brought it out in me,” she whispers as Diesel opens up the trunk and starts flinging luggage into the dirt. “This is why it has to be you. You’re the only one who can bring me out of my shell. Will you show me how I can be that way with him?”

Talk about a dick deflator.

“Why do you want this guy so bad, Snow?”

She nibbles on her lower lip. “When we were younger, you would always say that you belonged out there in the world, conquering the steepest mountains, and skiing down the craziest slopes, and now, through your business, you bring that sense of adventure to others. Your love has grown into something amazing. Well, I have a feeling deep down inside me, too.” She clenches a fist and holds it against her stomach. “I think Malcolm’s the one. I think this feeling inside me might grow into a kind of love I’ve never felt before. Everything seems to have lined up perfectly. And now my best friend is here to show me how to put my best foot forward so I don’t screw this up.”

I swipe my hands on my jeans as her words ring through my ears. First and foremost, Snow is my friend. I want what’s best for her. If she thinks she might love this guy, I have to do whatever it takes to make her happy.

“Sure thing,” I say. “I’ll teach you everything you need to seduce him, and more.”

And then send you to his bed.

This has been the plan from the moment she charged into my lodge. Not sure why I’m having such a problem with it now. Merely thinking about her with someone else—someone who will be pleasuring her and making her moan—gives me the

skin-crawling feeling that someone walked over my grave.

"What's the second rule?" she asks, watching the guys greet each other with knockout blows in the driveway.

Fuck if I know.

Don't return home after years away and clit-blaze your friend?

That certainly seems like a good one to me.

"You've got to slow your roll." *Real slow. Up and down. From the tip to the base of my shaft and back again.* Suppressing a shudder, I force thoughts of our interlude from my mind. "This isn't going to be a one-time thing. You'll have to entice Malcolm slowly, little by little. Before you can move on to rule number two, you have to go back to the estate." With a hollow pang in my gut, I check the time. "You'll have to practice the first rule on him."

"Got it." She ghosts her hands down the front of her gown. "Do I look all right?"

"Yes." *Gorgeous enough to make me want to drop to my knees and howl at the moon.* "But it's more than looks. Remember that you're the fishing lure—everything about you must create the illusion that you're his fantasy come to life."

"Temptation personified. Check."

"Don't throw yourself at him. You can touch him on the shoulder or thigh or hand, but you have to walk away as if it doesn't mean a thing."

"Touch and run. I can do that."

My head throbs as a picture of Snow and Malcolm together flashes through my head. It doesn't add up. Doesn't sit right. Malcolm isn't good enough for Snow, not by a long shot. But she wants him. I have to remember that.

"Talk or eat seductively to draw attention to your lips," I say, shaking my head to dislodge the image of the two of them together.

“O...kay.” She speaks the word slowly, as if she’s working out how to make the seduction game go off without a hitch. “Anything else?”

“Enhance your scent.” Smell is our most powerful sense—one that can arouse us to the point of madness. “Fluff your hair when he’s near—you know, that way women do that drives men crazy—or stand in a window, letting the breeze bring your aroma to him.”

“I can do that.”

She pushes a strand of raven-black hair over her shoulder as if on cue, and something shifts in my ribs. I rub my chest to soothe the ache growing there, but it doesn’t help. Must be indigestion.

“That it?”

She’s already got the no-panties thing down. And she looks like a million bucks with her curve-hugging gown.

“You’re ready.”

“Good.” She smiles victoriously. “I should get going. By the time I make it back it’ll be close to midnight. He’ll be expecting me. And you will be busy entertaining your friends, anyway.”

As she strides down the stairs, I go elbows down over the railing. “Hey, Snow.”

She turns, but so do the guys. Rocky has Cash in a headlock. J.D., Harley, and Diesel are checking out the rides while Goliath sits on the Camaro’s hood, his feet kicked up on the bumper.

“Yeah?” she says, her tone laced with sweetness.

“When you’re finished, come back.” They won’t get far—I know it. Malcolm won’t push himself on her, and she won’t be comfortable enough with the situation to stay long. But if I can get another chance to study her curves with my tongue, taste her pussy, and thrust into her heat, I’m going to take it and run. “We can pick up where we left off.”

She doesn't say a single word as she turns around and races into the forest. The guys, on the other hand, don't waste a single second before bolting onto the porch, hollering and laughing and giving me hell.

Talk about a stellar homecoming.

Chapter Five

SNOW

As I follow the path from Hunter's lodge back to the estate, I keep my eyes on the ground. Winding around towering trees, I duck below branches and clamber over fallen logs. The air is electric with moisture and the promise of rain. I can't see the clouds through the canopy of green overhead, but if I don't hurry, I'll be caught in a downpour. I hike up my gown, speed up my pace, and let my mind wander.

When I'm with Hunter, it's as if I'm possessed. Drunk or drugged, maybe. I can't explain it. I've never said *any* of those things before. Not even close. I'm not a girl who gets pleased while hiding out in the kitchen or screwed on the porch of my former friend's cabin.

I don't know what has gotten into me. Other than Hunter's gargantuan cock, of course.

Why didn't our relationship zigzag into the "friends with benefits" zone when he was here before? Did I always feel this way about him deep down?

I'm not sure, but when I'm in his arms and his mouth is covering mine, something awakens inside me. I want to feel that way when I'm having sex with "the one." Eventually. I want to be swept away, my body ravished, my mind blissfully blank.

Only, I didn't expect to have that kind of reaction to *him*.

It was supposed to happen with Malcolm. But that would've been too easy, wouldn't it? The perfect guy on *paper* is never the perfect guy in *person*. I'm the victim of life's cruelest joke.

Hunter has always been hot. But up close and personal? He's scorch-the-clothes-off-my-body hot. I suppose I should've expected it. He's a player who breaks hearts. He's got seduction down to an art form. That's his favorite study. And he's got some kind of allure that draws women in, too. I can't deny it.

No matter how lost I am in the moment, that's where things end between us. Whatever happens, it's physical only. Although my heart pounds and seems to call his name when we're in the middle of the best sex I've ever had, he's not the one for me. He hasn't changed. He's not monogamous, and that's what I need. After he gets what he wants from the women in his arms—whatever that is at the time—he turns them away.

Exactly how many women have been tangled in his sheets?

I've never given the details much thought before. But now that his lips have touched mine, his tongue has licked my nipples, and his fingers have swept between my legs...I can't think about anything else. He tasted delicious, like warm chocolate and temptation I've never known. His touch was greedy, but I wanted him to take more. *Everything*. I almost forgot that he wasn't really into me. He was simply demonstrating what it could be like with someone I truly wanted—someone like Malcolm Taylor, maybe.

But Hunter was so unbelievably *good*. Mouthwatering, body-quivering, core-pulsing, smack-my-lips-together yummy.

It goes against reason, but guess I wasn't expecting that. I'd closed my mind to the possibility that Hunter would be that powerful, that...*consuming*.

As I weave through the immaculate gardens and up the raised terrace, my chest goes tight. Nerves rattle through me like pinballs, and it's hard to catch my breath.

No pressure.

"You're not going to sleep with him," I mumble to myself, pushing through the French doors leading into the main house. "You're going to take this slow. See what happens."

The pep talk doesn't help. I'm still wired and twitchy, my nerves frayed.

The bar in the dining room is hopping—murmurs, laughter, and the clink of glasses hit my ears—but the living room is empty, thank goodness. I turn right, and then left, tiptoeing through shadowed halls until I reach Malcolm's room.

Hunter's words run through my head as I knock on the door.

Touch him, but pretend you don't care. Talk slowly, eat slowly, seduce him with your mouth. Enhance your scent.

Easy.

I got this.

"Malcolm?" I call out, my throat suddenly parched. I knock again. "It's Snow."

No pressure, no pressure, no pressure.

I wish my brain would tell my heart to stop freaking the fuck out.

I don't plan on doing what my stepmother suggested and seduce him to take his money. I'm not a gold digger. There's got to be another way to save the estate. I'm simply going to enjoy his company tonight. Get to know him and let him get

to know me. So what if I play up my assets a little?

"Come on in," he calls out. "It's open."

His room is bright and warm, lit by the chandelier overhead and a roaring fire in the hearth. He's kneeling in front of it, throwing a piece of kindling onto the flames, his Viking-blond hair brushing his shoulders. When I step inside, he glances at me from his crouched position, burning me through with heavenly blue eyes. In the flickering light of the fire, his skin appears gold and even, and I'm having trouble catching my breath.

"Honestly didn't think you'd show up tonight," he says, turning his attention back to the fire. "I'm glad you did. Thanks for having the estate staff fix my problem. No room swap needed."

Problem?

His eyebrows arch toward his hairline as he hitches his thumb over his shoulder. "My—"

"Oh, right." Strolling around the room, I glance at the unmade four-poster bed in the corner and the fruit tray on the small table. "Your bathroom. It's nothing."

Truth be told, it really was nothing. Not my doing at all. I'd been so fixated on getting my fill of Hunter that I completely forgot to report Malcolm's toilet issue. Customer service must've received his message and sent someone up to repair it.

"Did you bring the drinks?" he asks.

I feel my face scrunch. "What drinks?"

He stands slowly, brushing his hands together as if to warm them. "You said you'd bring up a shot."

"Oh. I did, didn't I."

Have I forgotten absolutely everything? The bathroom issue, the drinks. Hunter must've officially screwed me stupid.

Removing the rose from his lapel, he replaces the pin in the stem and sets it on the stone mantel. "Well, it's your lucky

day.”

Oh, I hope so.

“I have a stash of my own,” he goes on, his voice low and deep. And then he pours two glasses, half full. “Hope you like Crown.”

“Only ones covered in diamonds,” I tease.

But he doesn’t laugh. Instead, he shoots me a sideways glance and drops ice into the glasses before handing one over. Hunter said not to drink, but why would I turn down Malcolm’s offer if he’s already poured a glass. That’d be rude, wouldn’t it?

“I’ve always liked this room,” I say to break the silence and tip back my glass to take a drink. But the ice sticks, and as it dislodges, an ice avalanche hits my lips, sloshing liquor all over my face. “Oh my God.” I cover my mouth with my hand, wiping away the wetness. “I’m so sorry. I’m such a slob.”

“Don’t worry about it. Here, let me.” Sliding a napkin from the table, he dabs my chin gently and meets my eyes. Tenderness sparks in the depths of his irises, and if it’s possible to see into someone’s soul, I’m glimpsing his. “I hate it when ice shifts that way. Seems to happen to me almost every time.”

I grin sheepishly. He can’t mean that. He’s only saying it to make me feel better. Again, I’m out of sorts, and he’s the sophisticated one helping me with something I should be able to figure out myself.

“You know,” I say, breaking eye contact to walk toward the lounge area in front of the fire, “I helped decorate this place before my father passed away. These chairs were my favorite picks.” They’re wing-backed and oversized and suit the space perfectly. I perch on the edge of one and nurse what’s left of my drink. “I haven’t been in this room in a while. I almost forgot how comfortable they were.”

“I didn’t send my condolences when he died,” Malcolm says, toeing off his shoes and kicking them beneath the table.

"My family business was tied up in New York at the time. I'm sorry for your loss. Forgive me, but how long has it been?"

"Five years, six months, and two days. Not that I'm counting."

"Can't believe the time has passed so fast." He loosens the tie at his neck, jerking one way and then the other. "I lost my mother about a year after that. It's always a shock, isn't it? Even though we knew she had cancer, and we had plenty of time to say good-bye, there's nothing that can prepare you for the hole a parent leaves behind after they're gone."

Absolute truth.

There's nothing I can say because he just said it all. I miss my father more and more each day and wish he could be here with me now. He'd know what to do, how to save the estate. But I can't make sense of anything, and helplessness burns a big fat hole in my heart. As tears threaten to fall, I stroke my glass, swirl the liquid around, and gaze at the fire crackling beside me. Out of nowhere, an image of Hunter streams through my mind. If he were here, he'd wrap me up and make me feel safe and warm in front of the fire. If he were here now—

"Penny for your thoughts?" Malcolm says from the chair directly in front of me.

And I have no idea how he got there. I didn't even see him sit down.

He's taken off his tie and unbuttoned his shirt, leaving it to fall open at his chest. He's wearing a white cotton T-shirt beneath, and the casual look is amazing on him. He's leaning far back, one ankle kicked up on the opposite knee. He's staring at me, through me, undressing me with his eyes.

I quiver beneath the weight of his stare, painfully aware that precious seconds are passing me by and I'm not taking advantage of this opportunity. We've gotten through the introductions and formalities, and there's not going to be a

better time to put Hunter's lessons to good use.

Touch him, but pretend you don't care.

"I'm thinking about you, actually." Nerves are bunching and balling in the pit of my stomach as I lean forward and reach out for him, aiming for his leg. At the last minute, my mind jolts, jumps, and freezes. I shouldn't be going for his leg, but his knee. No, his ankle. I should stop.

Oh God, I've taken too long. My hand is hanging in midair.

I'm pointing at his black sock.

Shoot me now.

"Those are nice." Mortified, I flick his toe. Blood rushes to my cheeks, as I down my drink in three heavy gulps. I have to save this so I don't look like an idiot with a sock fetish. So I say the first thing that streams through my mind. "Armani?"

"Can't remember, but it's not important." He shrugs as if he doesn't have a care in the world. "What were you thinking about me? More than the brand of my socks, I hope."

"I was wondering how you got into the jewelry business," I lie.

He leans over, resting his elbows on his knees, a model of strength and sex appeal. He'd be magnificent as a wolf. Regal and stout, with flowing golden hair, blazing blue eyes...

"My father would buy my mother a piece of jewelry every year for their anniversary. He would spend days, weeks, searching for the right one." After finishing his drink, he reaches for the fruit plate on the coffee table between us and snacks on a few grapes. "He wanted something flawless, sparkling, and lovely, something special that would remind him of his love for her."

I'm lost in his story, captivated by his words.

But I can't forget why I'm here.

Seduce him with your mouth.

"Sounds like they were perfect for one another."

Absentmindedly, I snatch a banana from the tray and peel back the skin. *Talk slowly.* "So your father opened the store to supply quality jewelry to men who loved their women as much as he loved her?"

"Not exactly."

He's watching my mouth, eyeing it carefully. The slow talk must've worked. Now to go in for the kill.

Eat slowly.

As he stares, unflinching, I finish peeling the banana and raise it to my mouth. I close my lips around the fruit but bite off too large a piece. My cheeks are full, stuffed. I shift the mouthful from side to side, but it's impossible to keep my lips closed.

"So sorry," I mumble, covering my mouth with my hand. "I'm done."

As I try to set the banana down, it breaks off, right through the center of the stalk. A big ole chunk of fruit bounces off my lap before hitting the floor.

Sexiness fail.

"Ermahgerd," I mumble, cheeks stretched to the max.

What am I doing? Why couldn't I have just taken a normal bite like everyone else?

I swallow hard as Malcolm bends to pick up my mess. "It's fine. Won't leave a stain on the rug or anything so I wouldn't worry about it. Even if it did, I hear they have a great staff at the estate who can take care of just about anything."

Why can't there be a reset button on tonight? Well, I wouldn't want to go back and change all of it—not any of the parts featuring Hunter—but this whole section with Malcolm and the fruit would need to go.

I'd grin back at him, but those stringy things from the banana are probably lodged in my teeth. This is *so* not the way I'd envisioned this happening. Malcolm is being kind and gracious, and I really do like him more now than I did

before. But I'm not in his league. The chasm between us is so apparent, it hurts. He's smooth and handsome as hell, preferring women who are total bombshells. And I'm the girl who forgets to bring up a drink to his room, sloshes ice down her dress, drops food on the floor, and bites off more than she can chew.

My lungs are tight, my skin crawling. I want to claw my way out of here and never look back.

Finishing off the mouthful, I swipe my tongue over my teeth as I stand and brush my hands down my gown. "Malcolm, thank you for the drink and the banana, and for letting me come to your room tonight. I'll let myself out."

I can't be sure, but as I'm bolting down the hall, smacking myself in the forehead, I swear someone is calling out my name.

Chapter Six

SNOW

Even in the heart of the forest, rain penetrates the tree cover, wetting my exposed face, neck, and shoulders, and frizzing my hair. Leaves lift from branches as the wind picks up, dragging familiar scents to my nose.

I've almost reached his lodge.

The wind shifts, bringing with it a woodsy, masculine scent, mixed with hints of Guinness. There's only one person who smells that way.

Hunter.

"Hey, you," he says from behind me. "How'd it go?"

"Terrible." I spin, lifting my arms from my sides. "He doesn't want me."

His smile falls as light streams of rain trickle down his face. "Is that what he said?"

"No. But I told him I'd bring drinks to his room tonight, and I forgot, so I went empty-handed. And then when he offered me Crown, I drank, even when you said I shouldn't."

"And that's what makes you think he doesn't want you? Because you drank his liquor instead of bringing your own?"

"No. You're not getting it." I need to walk, to get the blood pumping through my veins again, to feel the wind on my face and the rain on my hands. Trudging toward his lodge, I weave around trees and over logs. I can feel his presence behind me, as I always do when he's near. "You told me to touch him, so I did, and that didn't work, either."

"I'm sure you're freaking out about nothing. I don't see how he could not want you, Snow." His voice cuts through the night as thunder rumbles somewhere in the distance. "Where'd you touch him? His hand? His chest?"

"I can't tell you. I'm too mortified."

"Don't tell me you touched his big throbby."

"Hunter," I scold, and nearly trip over a lifted root. "That's disgusting. I did not touch his big throbbing *anything*."

"Then what? Come on. It can't be that bad."

Huffing, I blow wet strands of hair out of my eyes. "I pinched his foot."

He snorts into a laugh. I haul around, swinging for him, but miss as he ducks out of the way.

"I *told you* I was going to screw this up," I say, and then I groan, covering my face with my hands. "I can't do this. I like him, Hunter, and he thinks I'm—"

"Gorgeous," he interrupts. And then his hands are coiled around my wrists, and he's dragging my hands back to my sides. "He's bound to see it sooner or later. Everyone does."

I kink my neck to the side and narrow my eyes at him. "Don't tease me, Hunter. After a night like I've had, I really don't need it."

On a night like tonight, when my former best friend screws my brains out and the guy I really like won't give me the time of day, the last thing I need is to be teased about something ridiculous.

"I wouldn't dare." He puts up his hands in mock surrender, and it only makes me want to punch him more. "I didn't mean to laugh. But his foot? What made you decide to focus on that...tiny, non-throbbing body part?"

I bite back my smirk. "I have no idea. Like I said, I was drinking—"

"Reason one hundred why you shouldn't."

"Right, I know, I didn't listen. I was drinking and nervous and overthinking, and I reached out but changed my mind at the last second. My thoughts were tangled up, and I didn't know what to do so I pinched his toe."

Lightning splits the sky overhead, and the rain pours down. On the wind, the sounds of laughter and bottles clinking together dance through my ears. We're close to the lodge—Hunter's friends must be having the time of their lives.

"What about everything else?" Hunter asks, keeping pace behind me, his step behind mine. "Did you remember the other things I said?"

"Oh yeah, I remembered all right." I step over a log, using the hand Hunter extends as support. His grip is firm, his hand calloused, but I keenly remember the magic they can perform on a trembling body. I repress a shudder as I say, "But I couldn't do anything right. I didn't even get to finish, so that whole thing about enhancing my scent went out the window."

"There's no need for that anyway," he says too quickly. "You smell like summer rain. I caught your scent the moment you stepped off the estate."

My steps slow as he moves alongside me. "You haven't heard the worst of it."

"Go on then."

As the rain picks up, we come upon some kind of clearing where the full moon sits directly overhead and the trees form a perfect ring around the grassy center. Hunter stands in the middle, staring up at the moon, his eyes closed as if he's

channeling its shifting energy.

“I’m listening,” he goes on.

But I’m frozen at the sight of him. Rain soaks his clothes, making the fabric cling to his muscles as they twitch and flex. Silver streams of moonlight illuminate the hard angles of his face. His mouth is parted slightly, his lips falling open, plush and soft.

Why can’t he have dreams of staying at the White Estate longer than a weekend? His business pulls him around the world, and I’m seriously rooted here, where I was born and raised. There’s no way that would work long-term. More than that, why can’t he want me beyond the physical? He’s not rich, so my stepmother would hate the idea of us being together—what good is he if he can’t save the estate, she’d argue—but we’d have passion. Night after night. Day after day. Doesn’t that count for something?

No. I chastise myself for even thinking it. I don’t want to be used for physical pleasure only, and that’s all he’s willing to offer. And even then it’s only for the weekend. He’s leaving after this. It’ll probably be another five years before I see him again.

“Snow,” he presses, finally lowering his gaze to meet mine, “what happened?”

“I drooled ice down my chin and took too big of a bite of banana and—”

“If you had a banana,” he says, half laughing, “I’m sure you were fine.”

I shake my head. “I don’t think so.”

“The way a woman holds and eats a banana makes a guy think of the way she’d hold and suck his dick.” He nods matter-of-factly. “Believe me, it’s a turn-on.”

“Ha!” I blurt, holding my fist up to my mouth. “Instead of massaging the fruit, I gripped it in my fist, and rather than sucking, I bit off the tip and broke it off at the halfway point.

How's that for sexy?"

He coils his arms around my waist and bends me into him. "You can grip me however you want, whenever you want."

"That's not true." My voice goes dark as his erection presses against my stomach. "Because after I've somehow convinced Malcolm Taylor that I'm the woman of his dreams, my lessons with you will be over. You'll be off in Iceland, taking care of business, and I won't be able to touch you at all."

"But you're here now," he says, tangling his fingers in my hair.

Closing my eyes, I shake my head slowly. Because I want more of this feeling zinging through me, more butterflies, and more rain to cool my burning flesh. Why can't things go this smoothly with other guys? Ones who are staying with the pack?

"You're not with Malcolm at this moment." His lips brush my cheek. "What happens tonight doesn't have to change anything tomorrow when you go back to him."

Another kiss on my cheek, closer to my lips.

"We're friends, aren't we?" I say, leaning into him and the warmth of his embrace. "Even after all this, that won't change, right?"

"Not if we don't want it to." He drags his fingers through my hair and bends me into him. "Friends kiss." And then his lips close over mine, sending chills scattering to the base of my spine. His tongue is in my mouth, sweeping against my cheek, exploring deep, weakening my resolve. "Friends touch." He traces the curve of my neck with greedy hands then drops down to my shoulders and arms, pinning me against him as he assaults me with fevered kisses. "Friends..."

"Grope?" I breathe into a laugh.

"Hell yeah." He grins against my lips. "And if you're lucky, there's another friend in my pants I'd like for you to get to know better."

On a crazed laugh and a whimper that's wrenched from the deepest part of me, I push up off my toes and stamp his mouth with a scorching kiss. He's warm and wet—or maybe that's the rain falling between our mouths—and tastes like roasted toffee and cream. *Guinness*. I lap him up. Twirl my tongue along his. Breathe in his exhales as he slants his head to deepen the kiss. Raking my fingers through his hair, I draw him closer still.

It's as if my body comes to life in his arms, each nerve ending like a live wire, every touch heightened. I *need* this—him. To cherish this moment and the strength of Hunter's body as it presses against mine, the greediness of his hands as they clutch my hips, the luscious sweep of his tongue as he feasts on my mouth.

I can't help but think of Malcolm. Would we have this kind of fire, this passion? Or is Hunter simply a sex god, incomparable to any other?

"Don't think." Pulling me against him, Hunter guides me, step by careful step, until my back is against a tree. "Be here, with me, in this moment."

Tendrils of white-hot energy spiral through my veins as he lifts my gown and pins it between us. His hand creeps up my thigh, moving north to where I'm already wet and aching for his touch. His mouth is on mine, hot and hungry, and as his tongue flicks out to trace my lower lip, I drop my head back against the bark, breathless.

"Tell me what you want, Snow."

I bury my face in his neck and breathe him in. Even with the brisk smell of the rain wafting around us, I pick up hints of spice and musk, and underneath that, something dark and forbidden. Chills scatter across my body as his fingers sweep through my sensitive flesh, causing the air to catch in the back of my throat.

"I want you," I start, but when he thrusts two fingers

inside me and slams his palm against the juncture between my legs over and over again, I cry out, desperate to feel his cock swell inside me.

"How do you want me?" He crushes his lips to mine viciously, driving his fingers deep before pulling them out and swirling them through my slick heat. "Hard and fast?" Using his free hand, he jerks down the top of my gown, freeing my breasts. Rain slickens them immediately, tightening my nipples to buds. He ravishes them with hard flicks of his tongue and then twists them between his fingers. "Or slow and soft?" His tongue begins moving with thick and languid strokes, his fingers pulsing in and out, drenching me completely.

How do I express all that I'm thinking and feeling? How do I condense the maelstrom of sensation inside me into meaningless words?

I want him to grind his hips against mine as he pummels me with his cock, so I can take every inch of him inside me. And then I want to feel nothing but blissful numbness, and I want him to be the one to take me there. I want him to brace himself over me so I can feel the full, delicious weight of him. I need his mouth on me everywhere, lapping me up, consuming me until I can't remember my name.

I need it because I may never know this kind of passion again.

"I want you to fuck me so hard and so deep," I say, as the air punches out of me, "that I'm numb for weeks." I'm quivering, about to come apart from anticipation alone. "Give me something to remember."

"If that's what you want, that's what you'll get," he says, nibbling on my lower lip. "Don't worry, baby. I'm going to give it to you just the way you like it."

Shudders roll through me. I don't doubt a word of what he says.

In a flash, he drops to his knees. I clutch at his hair and

suck in a clipped breath. And as he skims a hand along my thigh to edge my legs apart, I open up for his taking. From the ground, he gazes up my body, and for a moment I think he's going to say something. But he licks my slit, long and slow, and lets out a sound that's lost between a groan and a growl. It's primal, carnal, and calls to something deep within me, a part of me I can't even recognize.

He's mine.

"You taste so fucking sweet." Another slow lick against my trembling flesh. "Like honeyed apples."

As I sag against the tree, bark scrapes my back, making marks I'm sure, but I don't care. "No talking. More of your hot mouth."

"My pleasure." He growls low in his throat, fueling my desire. "Actually," he goes on, kissing me wildly, thrashing his head between my legs. "The pleasure will be yours."

"God—" Chills explode over my skin. I'm gasping. Trembling. Clawing toward release. "Yes..."

Raising my arms over my head, lost in sensation, I grip the tree, holding my body in place as he wages war on my clit with a flurry of kisses. I widen my stance and scream his name into the night as the most hard-hitting orgasm I've had in my life seizes hold of me. I'm delirious, blinded by ecstasy as he feasts on my silken flesh until my legs can't support my weight.

He slides up my body, roping an arm around my waist to hold me, wasting no time assaulting my mouth and plunging his tongue past my lips. I can barely taste my arousal because of the barrage of rain that's sliding between us, wetting our mouths, our bodies.

Lightning tears open the sky as I pop his fly. Unzip. Give his pants a solid yānk. He shoots me a grin as they fall to his knees.

"Eager?" His tone is laced with dark desire.

I nod slowly, drunk with pleasure, as my gaze drops from

his rippled abs to his massive erection.

Holy horse-cock, the gods have blessed him.

I'll never get over the sight of him — the feel of him, either.

I'm drooling, staring, going damp at the thought of taking him inside me again. And then he's wedging my knees apart, positioning his hips between mine. My dress bunches over my stomach, a barrier of fabric between us.

"Get this off." I'm desperate, gripping the gown in my fists, tearing stitches as I jerk it over my head. Nothing matters but feeling his body slide against mine, skin on skin. "Fuck me, Hunter."

His eyes widen with hunger, and he comes at me in a flash, fingers tunneling into my hair, his mouth crushing mine, his erection slamming against my stomach. He bends, angles away from me, hikes my leg around his waist, and then — I'm impaled by his shaft.

We groan in unison, going still as I grip him tight. Wet and beaded with rain, my breasts slide against his chest as he begins to move, slowly at first, and then faster and harder as he's overcome by a driving force neither of us can control.

He thrusts wildly, capturing one of my hands and pinning it over my head. His grip is solid, his fingers digging into my wrists, but his mouth is drugging. Animalistic. Feeding on my whimpers, he rams his dick in and out of me, in and out, on a collision course with the deepest walls of my sex.

"Come for me, Snow." He licks at my earlobe. Bites my shoulder blade. Plunges into my heat with relentless force. "I want to feel your pussy squeeze my dick the way it did my fingers."

I cry out at his words, tingling from the tips of my toes to the base of my spine. I want to be possessed by him, claimed and devoured, and then I want to do this all over again.

I'll never get enough.

With a jolt, he hoists me up, both legs around his waist,

thrusting at a different angle so he can drive home, right to my pleasure spot. Starbursts of brilliant white light go off behind my eyelids. My head falls back as sharp zings of ecstasy pulse through me, and as I buck against him, my core clutches at his cock, a fist closed tight.

“*God, Snow,*” he grinds out, his thrusts going staccato. With a guttural sound, he plunges into my heat, slower, harder, lifting me up and slamming me back down. “I’m going to fill up your tight little pussy. Ready for me to give it to you?”

“Please, Hunter.” Breathless, impaled by his thick length, I bounce against him, caught between his rock-hard body and the jagged bark of the tree, pleasure and pain. “Make me yours.”

“Oh—*fuck.*” And then he stills inside me as his cock jerks with the force of his release. “Snow...”

He comes hard, filling me with warmth, clutching me tightly against him, taking me there again as he groans and sucks my lower lip into his mouth. I breathe his name with each moan as the last waves of orgasm roll through me, and when I look into his eyes once more, they’re filled with adoration. Awe. And something else I don’t recognize.

“You’re one of a kind,” he whispers, planting an open-mouthed kiss to the base of my neck. “You know that?”

A grin pulls at the corners of my mouth as I grip his shoulders and cover his lips with mine. His mouth is soft, yielding, and for the life of me, I don’t know how I’ll ever forget this and move on. But tomorrow, after I learn the other rules, I’ll return to the estate and try to get closer to Malcolm.

But I’m his.

The words strike true, with the force of a bolt of lightning.

“For the next lesson,” he says, setting me back on my feet, “we’ll need the help of the guys back in the lodge. By the time they’re done with you, you’ll know how to seduce Malcolm Taylor with your hands tied behind your back.” His light eyes sparkle with mischief. “Literally.”

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SNOW WHITE'S SUBMISSION

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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To Justin

*For understanding when I promptly removed “submit and
obey” from our vows.*

Chapter One

SNOW

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST
WHITE WOLF PACK

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,” I whisper, staring at my reflection, “please tell me how to seduce them all.”

Because, apparently, I’m not even capable of seducing *one* werewolf, let alone seven of them.

My stepmother and I manage White Estate—a successful bed and breakfast built by my late father—but lately we’ve fallen into a pit of debt and despair, and we can’t seem to claw our way out of it. There is a solution, though it’s far-fetched. This month’s full moon celebration is special: it’s my twenty-fifth birthday, and I’ll finally be declared Alpha of our pack. Everyone is required to be here, including Malcolm Taylor, the super-hunky and mega-wealthy jeweler from New York City. I’ve had a crush on him from afar—he really is the perfect guy—and now he’s here, in my home, and I finally

have my chance to get to know him.

My stepmother didn't have to mention that he could singlehandedly save the estate. I'm keenly aware of our money troubles and the successes he's had in the jewelry business. If he'd simply fall head over heels for me, the way I have for him, everything would be perfect.

There's one problem, though.

Last night, when I met Malcolm in the main hall of our estate, he mistakenly thought I was janitorial staff. He called me sweetheart and patted me on the shoulder as if I were a freaking child.

Total. Fail.

At midnight, when I met him in his bedroom, I sloshed ice over my chin, shoved half a banana in my mouth, and then dropped the other half on the floor like a slob.

Thankfully, there's a solution.

Hunter, my childhood best friend who also returned last night, has always been a playboy—a self-proclaimed master of seduction with the ego to match. He's absolutely drool-worthy and can back up every bit of his talk. Built strong like a bear, he towers over my five-foot-four frame, with wide, sloping shoulders, a thick neck, and a square jaw. It's his features, soft as his body is hard, that really get my engine revving. The sexiest set of dimples I've ever seen flank his full lips. His jaw is clean-shaven, always smooth. And damn me as a liar if his blue eyes don't twinkle when he smiles.

He's the only one who can help me capture Malcolm's attention, for two reasons. One, he's only here for the weekend, which means we can get freaky without it being awkward afterward. His ski lodge business takes him all over the world, far from here, and he has no plans to stay. Two, he's always been able to get anything, and anyone, he wants. I need him to show me how he does it.

He agreed to teach me, of course—he's such a great friend—

but he seduced *me* instead. I was panting with desire not once, not twice, but *three* times before half the night had passed.

Bottom line? I tried to seduce Malcolm and failed. Miserably.

I wasted away my Saturday morning and afternoon at the estate, assisting staff with pack needs. I tried to bury myself in my duties, and avoided my stepmother at all costs.

Now that the sun has set, I'm back at Hunter's lodge for my second lesson in seduction.

He says it involves six of his friends. And I'm scared as hell.

He can't possibly plan for me to entice all of them. He has to know they wouldn't be into a woman like me. From what I've heard, they're testosterone-raging Alphas to the extreme, and I'm just...*me*. A little clumsy, shy, and naive.

Not their type at all.

Two knocks on the bathroom door jar me from my thoughts.

"Snow?" Hunter calls, his voice a gravelly rasp. "You okay in there?"

"Yeah." I've been collecting my thoughts for the better part of an hour. Time to face the music. "I'm coming out."

As I push the door open, the air hiccups in my chest. Hunter is standing on the opposite side of the hall, directly across from the door, his foot kicked up behind him, his arms folded over his chest. Although it can't be possible, he seems to get better looking every time I see him.

"Thought you might've fallen in." A sexy grin teases the corner of his lips, just enough to reveal the adorable prick of his dimples. "Come on. I want to introduce you to the guys." He takes my hand the way he used to do when he wanted to show me an animal in the forest, or a hidden stream he'd stumbled upon. But now, currents of energy spiral between his hand and mine, zinging through my arm. "You're shaking. You shouldn't be nervous, Snow. They're all bark and no bite."

That's not what I'm worried about.

It's something about Hunter's touch, even in something as innocent as holding my hand, and the way my body responds to him now. On contact, heat blooms through my body, making my chest tingle and my knees weak. I want his hands on me everywhere, toying with me, leading me to that delicious peak that's just out of reach. I want his lips to crush mine, his tongue to sweep through my mouth and press against my cheek. I crave the taste of him and want him more than I've ever wanted anyone else.

But it's physical only.

It has to be.

That's the way Hunter lives his life. Moving from country to country, from one adventure to another without a permanent home. It makes settling down with one woman nearly impossible unless she doesn't mind traveling constantly. I'm not that woman, so I know what I'm getting into with him. I don't even bother hoping for more.

"I'm not nervous to meet them, exactly," I say, more to quiet the rattling inside me than anything else. "But what if they don't—"

The second I step into the lodge's great room, my words cut short.

I'm not quite sure what I was expecting, but four guys huddled around a circular poker table, fisting beers in one hand and cards in the other was *not* it. It's not the poker table or the chaos ensuing over a busted hand of Texas Hold 'Em that has the breath frozen in my lungs. It's the guys' drop-dead, double-take-worthy good looks. I'd seen them when they'd first arrived and were exiting their cars in the driveway. But I must've been preoccupied because my brain didn't register the details of their hotness.

Golden tan skin. Square, stubble-covered jaws. Strong, wide shoulders. Full, lush lips revealing Colgate-white teeth.

Roughed-up jeans. Arm tattoos peeking from beneath the sleeves of black T-shirts.

As my gaze skids from one to the other, I realize each one is better looking than the last. With the exception of Hunter, of course. The level of his sexiness is untouchable.

With a curse, the smallest werewolf of the bunch pushes back from his chair storms into the kitchen. Only then do I notice their size.

Holy Zeus, they're huuuuuge.

Not a single runt in the bunch.

A few of them must have Viking blood or something. Or maybe they've got mutated superhuman genes that make them larger than the average male. Whatever the cause, these guys are the most muscular men I've ever seen. Stripped right from a men's muscle magazine.

Stripped.

My mind careens straight for the gutter. Shirts ripping in half, revealing ripples of hot, wet corded muscle. Six packs. Twitching chest muscles. Dark tattoos. Pants dropping to the floor, revealing their long, thick—

“Snow?” Hunter’s touching my arm. “You all right?”

“Mm-hmm.” I suck up the drool that was collecting in my mouth. Did someone kick up the thermostat? I feel like I’m sweating. “Fine.”

Every single one of them. *F-i-fuck-me-fiiiine.*

It’s as if I’ve walked into a room full of the Avengers, drop-dead sexy and fully capable of beating anyone’s ass. Only, these guys are hotter. And single.

Score.

“Winning, Cash?” Hunter says.

“You know it.” Cash shuffles the deck, and the sound of cards slapping against one another fills the lodge. “Want me to deal you in?”

“Not this time. I’m still angry about the fifty bucks you

stole from me last week.” Hunter places his hand on the small of my back, and I can’t help but press against the heat flowing from the heart of his palm. “Guys, I’d like you to meet Snow White.”

They nod, mumble something about it being their pleasure, meet my eyes for a flicker of a second, and then return to their game.

What the hell?

My ego deflates. I may not be the most gorgeous woman they’ve ever seen, but they’re a group of unmated male werewolves, and I’m the only woman in the vicinity. If I can’t capture the attention of four playboys, how can I possibly expect Malcolm Taylor—a guy who chases after Jessica Rabbit types—to like me?

Hunter has to teach me more.

“Nice to finally meet you,” the blond says, extending his hand, though he still doesn’t meet my gaze. “I’m Derek, but these idiots call me Cash. Feel free to do the same.”

“Nice to meet you, too.” I take his hand and shake. His grip is firm, but his hands are soft, as if he’s never worked a day in his life. “Can I ask the reason for the nickname?”

“Because he doubles his cash every time he sits down at this table,” the burly one to his left snaps. “Though, he won’t be doing that tonight. Not as long as I’m warming this seat.”

“Ignore Harley. He thinks he’s got a sense of humor.” Cash flings a card, hitting Harley in the chest. “The White Estate is yours, yeah?”

“My father’s actually, but since he passed, my stepmother—”

“You don’t go to many of the full moon parties, though. Haven’t seen you around in ages.”

I cross my hands in front of me. “I don’t care for crowds.”

“If you don’t show up every now and again,” Cash says, dropping a fistful of chips into the center of the table, “people

will start to think your stepmother keeps you locked in the tower.”

“The lodge doesn’t have a tower, moron.” The one who looks like a sexy lumberjack—coarse, dark hair, thick beard, haunting onyx eyes—looks at the cards he’s dealt and smacks them down again. “But Hunter does have a thing for locking women up. Remember that one we had to rescue from the bedpost all those years ago? She was a—”

“Diesel.” Hunter’s jaw is tight and set. “Don’t you have a car to fix up or something?”

“Not here.” Diesel shoots a megawatt smile at Hunter as Cash deals more cards around the table. “The Camaro’s already in top form. Ran eleven-six in the quarter last month.”

“He’s a gearhead,” Hunter whispers over my shoulder, his breath tickling the hairs on my neck. “Can’t think about anything but American muscle.”

“And women,” Diesel interjects.

“He got his newest project last year,” Hunter continues as if he didn’t hear, “and hasn’t stopped working on her since.”

Now that I’ve tasted Hunter, I wouldn’t mind him working on me...

“Hey, gorgeous.” Cash drags my attention back to him and for the first time, locks his eyes on mine. There’s fire and determination in his steely gaze. “The game is 3-5-7. Jokers wild. And just for tonight,” he says with a wink and a smile, “the ladies are, too.”

Blood rushes my cheeks. He lets the innuendo fly loudly as he shuffles once more, and then his eyes shift to Hunter. A growl echoes through the lodge, though I’m not sure if it comes from Hunter or one of the brothers who just lost a good hand.

“Hunter might not want in, but that doesn’t mean you can’t play with us. What do you say?” a gruff voice rumbles from behind me. As he passes by, he hands me a glass of

something that smells like bourbon. "I'm J.D., and I saved you a seat." He plops himself onto the nearest chair and pats his lap. "Come on, baby. Hop on."

"Oh—well, all right," I stutter, my cheeks flushing hot as I shuffle closer. "I don't really know how to play, though."

J.D. laughs huskily as Cash waggles his eyebrows.

"Oh, we'll show you," Diesel says, nodding slowly. "Don't worry. You'll be in real good hands."

"Snow, can I talk to you for a second?" Hunter touches my elbow gently, but heat blazes up my arm as he leads me toward the kitchen. "Probably best not to feed the animals. At least, not yet."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing." He pulls out a stool from beneath the island and motions for me to sit. Removing a Guinness from the fridge, he pops the top and takes a long swig. "We should get back to those rules. You'll be going back to that asshat in the morning."

"Malcolm's not an asshat," I counter, frowning.

As he shrugs, averting his gaze from mine, waves of jealousy ripple in the space between us. I don't need heightened werewolf senses to pick up on it. But what reason would Hunter have to be jealous of Malcolm? It's not like Hunter wants to stick around and build a forever with me.

"Anyway, we need to go over the second rule." I'd almost forgotten. But I need to stay focused. I'm not here to play poker with Hunter's friends. I mean, he said the next rule involved them, but he couldn't have meant losing all my money. "Lay it on me."

"Oh, don't I wish." He exhales heavily, pounding the table with his fists. "Focus." He pinches his eyes closed and clenches his jaw, as if the last part was spoken for his benefit rather than mine. "The second rule of seduction is that you have to become the center of the object's universe...while ignoring

him completely.”

I frown, taking a sip of my drink. The spicy, woodsy liquor trickles down my throat, warming me from the inside out. “You have to give me more than that.”

Again, his jaw clenches and a dark shadow passes over his sapphire-blue eyes. “Contrary to what you might think, becoming the center of someone’s world doesn’t happen by constantly getting in front of them. It has nothing to do with close proximity at parties. In fact, it’s the opposite.”

I try to follow where he’s going, but the sound of chips crashing, voices booming, and cards flying through the room is more than distracting.

“Let me get this straight.” Leaning over the granite island, I rub my temples. “The first rule is to be the physical lure, glancing at him from afar, talking slowly, eating seductively, drawing attention to my mouth, touching him, but all the while pretending I really don’t care at all. And the second rule is to become the center of his world without actually being in it?”

He nods decidedly. “You got it.”

“No, I don’t.”

“It’s exactly as you said.”

“But...” This isn’t making sense. “How will he know I like him if I don’t show him? And how do I become the center of his world if I’m standing on the outside?”

Behind me, one of Hunter’s brothers accuses another of stacking the deck. Some kind of fight ensues, but I won’t tear my eyes from Hunter’s. I like Malcolm, I do. He’s a perfect gentleman and fits the image of the dream guy I have in my head. Malcolm’s amazing. Everyone in the pack knows it. If I can get him to fall for me, not only will I have nailed the most eligible bachelor in our wolf pack, but my family’s debt will disappear. Bye-bye problems, hello happily-ever-after.

I *have* to know how to do this. And Hunter is the only one who can show me.

He leans over the island, matching my distance, and whispers, "You seduce his friends, instead. You become the life of the party, irresistible to everyone in his inner circle. Then, when you're surrounded by his closest friends, and each of them is absolutely captivated by you, he'll wonder why he isn't, too. You'll have the attention of every male in the room...including the one you want...without involving him in the seduction at all."

As my thoughts race, trying to catch up to his seductive genius, I worry my lower lip between my teeth. "I see what you're saying, but it's harder than it seems. If I knew how to be that captivating, I wouldn't be single."

"I bet you don't get asked out because you're closed off." Standing once more, Hunter takes a stiff drink. "You give off the vibe that you don't want to be asked. You'll have to flip that switch. Be alluring without actually inviting him closer."

"How, exactly, do I...flip it?"

"When you first arrive at the party or event, grab one or two friends and head to the center of the room. Rather than smile all the time, over every little thing, only laugh if it strikes you—it can't be forced. Smirk. Wet your lips. Hold eye contact longer than normal, with every male you can."

"Isn't it rude to stare?"

"If you're staring blankly, yes." He narrows his eyes, and my skin prickles with heat. "But you're going to be imagining each guy in bed, screaming in ecstasy, his cock pulsing inside you."

Holy freaking shit.

Just like that, I'm wet, nearly panting, unable to rip my eyes from his.

"And then," he goes on, swiping his tongue over his lips, "when you get that picture in your head, and you feel your pussy start to get wet, you're going to slowly move your gaze to the next guy." He removes his stare from mine, but I'm still flushed, my chest hot. "And then the next." His gaze meets

mine once more, and this time he doesn't need words. "Until you're finally staring at the one you want." His eyebrow hitches, just slightly, but it's the sexiest damn thing I've ever seen. I'm quivering with desire. "And there's nothing he can do to escape you."

I know what he's doing. I felt it when he first laid eyes on me at the kick-off party at the estate last tonight, and I feel it now.

"Lastly, you're going to glide around the room, from one position to another, every ten minutes or so."

"What's the point of that?"

"You'll seem more dynamic, not so much like a wallflower. Lively people are more approachable. All he'll have to do is wait for you to get to a group he feels comfortable with, and *he'll approach you.*"

Heart beating fast, cheeks hot with the sudden rush of blood, I finish my drink. "I think I'm picking up what you're putting down," I say, choosing my words carefully. Because there's nowhere else I'd rather be than right here, learning this lesson from Hunter's luscious mouth. "But what does this have to do with your friends?"

His irises darken. "You're going to play them so hard they'll be fighting over who gets to fuck you first."

"Seduce your friends? That's really the plan?" I ask, my voice screeching a bit. "I thought you were joking earlier. I can't—"

"You can." He nods, otherwise unmoving. "And you will. This is the only way you'll see how sexy you truly are. How you can manipulate every dick in this room if you want to."

"If you say so." Swallowing hard, I give the top of my strapless gown a good yank. My girls are going to need to be at their best to pull this one off. "But it's not going to be easy."

"Baby," he says as I turn and stride toward the poker table, "they wouldn't want you if you were."

Chapter Two

HUNTER

Talk about a test of wills.

Watching Snow seduce my buddies is harder than I thought it'd be. When she sat next to them and jumped into the poker game, commanding their attention, I nearly burst out of my skin. The werewolf part of me is holding back, barely refraining from taking over and seizing control of the situation.

I have to remember Snow isn't mine.

She never has been and never will be.

Our paths are going in two completely different directions. She's on the fast track to matrimonial hell, and I can't even picture what I'm going to have for dinner tonight, let alone who will warm my bed the rest of my life. Even if I wanted to settle down and raise a few werewolves with someone, she'd have to enjoy moving around every few months. My business is just starting to pick up, and it takes me around the world. If I'm honest with myself, I know it's not the

traveling I love so much—it's the rebuilding process. Taking a ski lodge that's suffering miserably, giving it a major facelift, and then watching it flourish, filled with people seeking new adventures—that's the rush I love.

I love Snow, too, but it's platonic, in the way a childhood friend loves another. I want her to be happy, no matter what that means. Growing up, I never saw her as more than a friend. She was Snow. Plain, simple, little Snow.

She's nowhere close to plain, simple, or little anymore.

And now my buddies are going to see it, too.

An hour drones by, each second slower than the last. I flop onto the couch next, checking emails and scrolling through social media channels, pretending I don't give a shit about the game of cat and cock that's playing out over my shoulder.

But every time her giggly laugh gets out of hand, morphing into something that should be obnoxious as hell, I find myself smiling and laughing quietly along with her. And they are, too, damn it.

She's winning them over.

Happiness radiates through her and around her, lighting up the lodge as if it's bright and sunny rather than gloomy and shadowed.

They find her irresistible, too.

By the time another hour slinks by and the clock ticks over to midnight, my stomach is jittery and my throat is dry as the Sahara. Time for a drink. Snatching another Guinness from the fridge, I pop the top and march toward the poker table. Cash, J.D., Diesel, and Harley are leaning back in their chairs, guarding their cards or peeling back the corners to take a last-minute peek. Rocky and Goliath, the two who'd rather play with women than cards, are in wolf form, howling at the full moon from the back balcony.

"This is bullshit." Cash tosses his fistful of cards onto a heaping pile of chips in the center of the poker table. "That's

three in a row.”

Snow scoops the chips her direction. “What can I say? Tonight’s my lucky night.”

Diesel grunts into a laugh. “You sure you’re not hiding anything up your sleeves?”

“Here,” she says sweetly, extending her arm toward him. “Feel for yourself.”

Anger floods through me in a zinging rush as Diesel takes her by the wrist and strokes his fingers up and down her arm. She laughs again, a sweet giggling melody, and bites her lower lip.

I should be the one touching her arm, brushing my thumb against the inside of her wrist, weaving my fingers between hers. I want to pin her arms over her head as I drive into her, harder and faster, linking hands as our hips meet.

But that’s going too far.

She’s not mine.

“Next time you’re going to want to check what I’m hiding up my gown, aren’t you?” Smirking, Snow goes back to the game. This time, she’s dealing, and as each card flings forward, her gaze lands on the guy receiving it. “I don’t cheat. Never have. Must be beginner’s luck.” She shrugs her smooth, dainty shoulders. “Don’t you guys ever get lucky?”

I could be deaf and still hear the innuendo in her words. She plays the part of the seductress so well that I’m hard as steel under my fly.

“Oh yeah,” Harley blurts, waggling his eyebrows as he collects his card. “Hoping tonight’s my lucky night. Maybe you could help with that.”

“Maybe.”

And my gut clenches into a fucking fist.

“But I wouldn’t bet on it,” she adds quickly. “You’re not my type.”

Every guy around the table whoops into a raucous of

laughter and begins raining fists over Harley's head.

As I'm reaching out for his arm to bend it behind his back and break it off, reality smacks me hard. I've no claim staked on Snow. I don't have any say in who she flirts with. She's as much his as she is mine. Hell, I'm teaching her how to loosen up so she can land Malcolm Taylor, for Christ's sake. Who cares if she gets a rise out of Harley, or any of them?

I force the rage in my veins to simmer down as I circle the table, eyeing each of their cards. Only, when I'm behind Cash, facing Snow, I realize she's not looking at me. Not one glance. Nothing.

She wins the hand—again—and the deal goes to J.D. He stops mid-shuffle, shooting a glare her way. "What do you say we make this really interesting?"

She leans toward him, bumping him playfully in the shoulder. I throw up a little in my mouth.

"Go on," she croons, her voice a caress against my ears.

"Let's make it strip poker."

"You're dreaming," I blurt, laughing, "Snow wouldn't--"

"I'm in," she interrupts, keeping her gaze away from mine. "Sounds like fun. What have I got to lose anyway? I'm on a winning streak. Prepare to get naked, boys."

They grumble and snicker, deal and make bets. And it's a good thing she won't look at me now, because I'm pale. White. Shocked at the idea that she would even *consider* stripping down in front of these horny, ego-maniacs. They're my friends and cool as hell, but for Snow? Not worth their weight in piss.

Why won't she look me in the eye, not even once?

Cards are face up on the table. Everything's revealed. Surprise—Snow is left with a pair of threes. Shit, she's wearing nothing but her ruby-red gown. The guys are drooling, staring, laughing their asses off.

"I'm starting to think you played me," she says, removing her earrings and setting them in front of her. "But I can play,

too. Let's go again."

Another round. Another loss.

Still no eye contact, even though I'm standing right fucking in front of her.

"Good hand." Kinking her head to the side, she removes the pins from her hair and drops them onto the table. Raven-black strands of hair fall from the crown of her head, creating a halo of dark silk. The guys are stunned stupid. Speechless for the first time in their lives. But I know how silky that hair feels sliding through my fingers. How it sticks to the nape of her neck when she's sweaty and lost in the throes of ecstasy. "Darn it," she says. "Can't believe you guys beat me again. Well, I'm bound to win sooner or later, right?"

She emphasizes the word *bound*, and I can't help but imagine her tied up to my bed. Hair tangled over her face. Mouth hanging open. Legs spread eagle as I hammer into her heat. The memory of taking her against the tree in the forest lingers in my head, as vivid as if it just happened.

This round, she's busted. Nothing but a random mismatch of hearts, clubs, and every number up and down the line.

"I don't know how this is happening. At least I still have my bra," she says, reaching into the top of her dress. The room goes quiet, completely still, as she stops, slumps a little as if she's defeated, and says, "I forgot I'm not wearing one."

Fuck me.

I'm hard as a rock. Desperate to see her breasts one more time. Determined for none of the assholes around the table to view them as I have.

As they stare, mouths dropping open, she bends down, removes her heels, and places them on the center of the table.

"Silly me, I *do* have one last thing before the gown comes off," she whispers innocently, taking the cards to deal for her turn. "But if I lose one more, I'll be buck naked. Talk about pressure."

I'm so distracted, so consumed with the idea of seeing her nude once more, I can't focus on the cards at all. A few are dealt onto the center of the table. She bets big, pushing all her chips in. Cash and J.D. match her bet, gawking, staring at her tits.

When this is over, I'm ripping out their eyeballs. It's decided. She turns over the cards on the table, and as each of the guys reveals his hands, she sits back. Drops her shoulders. Reaches around and starts unzipping.

I'm going to lose my shit. They can't see her naked. They're already salivating at the chance to get to her—the testosterone in the room is palpable, as rich and thick as the cologne they sprayed on before they got here.

Smiling, Cash shows his hand and leans back, arms looped behind his head as if he's won. And if he's right, he just cleaned house. Every single chip is in the center of the table.

"Damn," Snow says with a breathy sigh. "That's a stellar hand. Looks like you're the lucky one tonight."

Everyone is hanging on her every word, on every slouch of her dress as it loosens over her breasts. She's actually going to strip bare in front of everyone. Kill me now. Rage pounds through my veins, threatening to consume my vision with flares of red.

"I could only wish to have a hand like that." She unzips the top, and the loose fabric shows the swell of her creamy skin. A little lower and she'll reveal her perfectly pink nipples.

I can't stand here and watch and let them get an eyeful.

Mine.

"Well, I guess," she says, standing in front of them, as rain batters the windows behind her, "there's only one thing left to do."

"Hell yeah," Diesel says, pushing back as if she's going to give him a lap dance.

She smirks, her tongue flicking out to sweep over her

lower lip.

“Fuck *no*,” I growl.

The words are ripped from the deepest part of me. I rush around the table and toss her over my shoulder squealing and kicking. I carry her to the bedroom and chuck her onto the bed, slamming the door behind me. She shimmies over the bed, scooting back on her hands, eyeing me with a mixture of shock and fear.

She shouldn't be afraid. I'm not going to hurt her. No, I'm going to make her feel so damn good she won't be able to walk straight for weeks.

I'm on top of her before she can move too far, pinning her with my hips, trapping her in the cage of my body. As I crush my mouth to hers, a bomb of sensation explodes in my body. Currents of electricity whip through my arms and legs. Air punches out of my lungs as I work her lips, suck on her tongue, nibble her bottom lip.

I can't get enough.

Even if she gives me everything, it'll never be enough.

I'm keenly aware of the flare of possessiveness in me—I want to claim her, pin her, drive into her so fucking hard we become one and never part.

“You were going to strip down.” I assault her mouth with ravenous kisses, feast on her whimpers as they escape the back of her throat. “Bad girl.”

“No,” she breathes, lifting her hips so they press against my aching shaft, “I was never going to go all the way.”

“You will now.”

Bracing myself on one arm, I slink the other behind her back and tug on the loose fabric. It comes free easily, unzipping to her waist. Proving my point, I silence her argument by thrusting my tongue into her throat as I jerk the top part of the dress down to her waist. Consumed with the need to feel her skin-on-skin, I strip the T-shirt from my torso and fling it

behind me. She eyes me hungrily, raking her fingers down my abs, to the patch of hair below my belly button.

"Another second and you would've bared everything." Rearing up on my knees, I unbutton my pants and jerk them down. "Your tits..." I suckle her nipple into my mouth and gently graze my teeth against its perfect peak. "Your stomach..." I plant wet kisses over her stomach. "And I already know you're bare..." I slide my hand up her dress, between her silky-smooth thighs, and sink my fingers into her heat. "God, you're so wet."

She moans, spreading her legs, dropping her head onto the pillow. And then she lifts her hand into the space between us, revealing the cards still in her grasp. Full house. Aces over queens.

"I wasn't going to strip," she says as I still over the top of her. "I was distracting them with the possibility so I could kick their asses."

Beautiful. Perfection. "Clever girl."

Grinning ear to ear, I stamp my mouth to hers. I kick off my pants and strip the gown from her glorious body, planting my hands on her thighs to spread her open wide as I slide down her body. She clutches at my hair with a hiss and rears up as I take a long, slow drag through her slick folds. I've already tasted her tonight, and under normal circumstances, would've already had my fill.

But with Snow, it's different.

I've always been out for myself, fulfilling my own needs first. I've been called a lone wolf on more than one occasion. But when it comes to Snow, I want to care for her, pleasure her, and satiate her desires. It's an impulse deep in my gut that I can't squelch. •

I can't get enough of her. I'm crazed with need, desperate to lap up every creamy drop of her arousal. She moans through her supple, parted lips, and clutches at my shoulders

as I settle in, tasting, feasting, sliding my tongue inside her.

"Tell me what you want, Snow." Swirling my tongue over her pleasure spot only increases the frenzy inside me, and as I lick harder, flicking her clit, she goes rigid. "I want you to teach me what drives you wild."

"You—God, Hunter..."

My name is a silent plea on her lips, and it spurs me on, stoking the fire burning inside my gut. I want her screaming so loudly, every one of the bastards in the lodge can hear. I want her writhing and coming on my face.

"Tell me, baby." I spear her with my tongue and groan, filling her with the vibrations of my voice. "You can say it."

She hesitates, panting, and then, "Grip my ass when you lick me."

Hell yeah.

Wild with need, I slide my hands beneath her hips and knead the soft flesh of her rear in both hands. Then, in one swift move, I flip her over so she's on her hands and knees, holding herself up on her elbows, her knees parted in front of me, exposing everything. She gasps as if she's shocked, but when I dive between her legs and grip her ass tight, she stills.

I'm on my back, flush against the mattress. It's the perfect position to press her hips toward my mouth, giving her the pressure she craves. Her hips undulate over my face as I lick languid strokes through her glistening slit.

"Just," she says on a gasp, "like...that."

Thrusting my tongue in and out of her heat, I groan in approval, needing more than she can give from this position. With one hand on her backside, holding her down over my mouth so I can assault her clit, I stroke my dick with the other. Faster and faster, my fist moves up and down over my shaft as I imagine stretching her tight and filling her up.

"Hunter...that feels..." Her breath hitches, and over my head, her breasts bounce in time with the dropping of her

hips. "Don't stop."

Working my dick in my hand, I swirl my tongue over her clit more slowly, drawing out her pleasure, and when she comes with an ear-splitting cry, I nearly blow my load with her.

"You..." She moans, the roll of her hips waning as the orgasm loosens its hold on her. "You were built for pleasure."

I have the insane urge to correct her, to tell her I was built for *her*, but I clamp my mouth shut before that foolishness seeps out.

She's not mine.

But that doesn't mean I'm finished with her yet.

Flipping over, she jolts to her hands and knees on the opposite side of the bed. Her luscious breasts bounce freely, her nipples drawn to tiny pink buds, and I fight the urge to hop off the bed and slam into her from behind. I'm wound so damn tight I could burst from the sight of her alone.

"I want to suck you," she says, sliding her hands down the flat span of her stomach as if to cover herself. "But I don't—I mean, I've never—I don't think I'm good at it."

"Why the devil would you think that?"

She bites her lip in that coy way that drives me insane. "I've never done it before."

"As long as you don't bite it off like the banana, you're good to go."

She snorts into a laugh. "God, I'd never do that. I just want you to enjoy it, and I don't know what I'm doing."

"Snow," I say, lying down beside her, "you're mind-blowingly sexy and everything you do is perfect. Giving head will be no exception."

"Will you..." She crawls over the bed, situating herself between my legs. "...teach me how you like it?"

My mind goes slate-blank, so I take her hair in my fingers, grip the ends tight, and guide her down over my cock. Before

I can give a single instruction, she clutches my shaft in one hand, squeezes with the right amount of pressure, and begins to twist as she moves up and down. Up and down. Twisting and turning, gripping and then—good God—delicious wet heat envelopes my dick from base to tip. I suck in a hiss as a tingly rush of sensation gathers in my spine.

Lost in a storm of ecstasy, I pinch my eyes closed as she works me with her tongue and her hand in unison. Every muscle in my body tightens as she strokes faster and faster and her tongue flicks out over my tip. When I open my eyes, she's staring up at me, her dark eyes watering as she's taking everything and eagerly sucking for more.

"Fuuuuuck." The word rips from my lips in a jumble of syllables. She's going too fast, taking me too far. I want to be inside her so fucking bad, but if she doesn't stop now, it won't happen. I can't hold back. "Slow...down."

"Like this?" She misunderstands, removes her hand from the base of my shaft, and thrusts my dick so deliciously deep in her throat.

I should be pushing her away. Flipping her over and plunging into her heat. But I'm speared with lust, blind to anything but the feel of her warmth and wetness. Void of words, I squeeze her shoulder gently, giving the sign to stop before I erupt into her mouth.

But she doesn't stop.

"Snow..." I tap frantically as sensations ball at the base of my spine.

"I want to taste you." She licks the moisture pooling at the tip and then swirls her tongue as she guides me deep. "Every last drop."

And then I'm fucking her mouth again, hard and wild, hitting the back of her throat, sinking past her soft lips. As she lets out a muffled mew—the sexiest sound I've ever fucking heard—I explode with force, pulsing into her hot mouth as I

rake my fingers through her hair.

By the time the feeling returns to my legs, she's gone to the restroom, washed up, brushed her teeth, and returned, jumping into my bed wearing nothing but a smile. As she dives under the sheet, I tuck her against me and breathe deeply for the first time since she walked into my cabin tonight.

Forget tomorrow when she has to go back to What's-His-Fucking-Face. She's here now, in my arms, my long-lost best friend, and I'm going to get my fill of the best sex of my life. We'll screw until morning, until I've wrung every orgasm from her body and she's naked and trembling and unable to walk back to the estate on her own.

Then she'll be mine.

Thunder rumbles the walls of the cabin, jarring me back to reality. Wait—no. *Fuck*. What the hell am I thinking?

She's not mine, and she never will be. On a physical level, I can sense what her body craves, and I'm beginning to understand her secret desires. But that's lust and nothing more. She wants a marriage and two-point-two children and a forever home here at the estate. I'm due back in Iceland on Tuesday for a major business deal. The plans are already in motion. My associates are waiting on me. Once Snow's declared Alpha and I give her the gift her father made me promise to deliver to her, I'll be on my way. Besides, she's got her eye on a different fucking guy who doesn't deserve her.

"I guess the lesson worked," she said, as the sound of Rocky and Goliath's howls blend with the thunder. "I tried my best not to look at you during the poker game. You have no idea how difficult that was."

And then it hits me.

She wasn't meeting my gaze because *I* was the one being seduced. *I* was the object of her desire, the one who was supposed to be on the outside looking in—the man she drove crazy without acknowledging him.

It was part of her game. And I fell right into her plan.

“Yeah, you got me—hook, line, and sinker. I’d say you’re ready for Malcolm this time.” I pull back far enough so that I can gaze into her chocolate-brown eyes, but I can’t read them. “If that’s still what you want.”

My stomach catches as I wait for her to answer.

“I have to go back,” she says, too quickly. Too decidedly. “I have to know if Malcolm is the one for me, the one I’ll share my future with, and the one who’ll save”—she stops short, her eyes darting from mine—“save my heart from a lifetime of loneliness.”

That wasn’t what she’d meant to say. I can read her like an open book. But hell if I know where she was going with that.

I heard the message loud and clear, though—she still wants him.

“Got it.” I pull her over my lap. “But you’re not going to leave this bed anytime soon. Not until I get my fill.”

As the storm rages outside, she stills, bracing herself over the top of me. Her eyes are dark and clouded with doubt. “I don’t want to, but—”

“But?”

“I should,” she says slowly, her breath fanning over my face. “Before the storm gets out of hand.”

Talk about slamming on the brakes. Without another word, she dismounts from my middle and dresses in a rush, as a clammy wave washes over my skin.

She wants to leave?

Was she not in this bed just now? We’re explosive together, with mind-blowing, earth-rocking, off-the-charts passion. But no one has ever jumped out of my bed so fast. Have to admit, it’s a little ego-deflating.

“I’ll drive you over.” I’m off the bed and shoving my legs in my pants, anger building inside me. “Hate to see you miss out on something you’re determined to see through.”

"Hunter," she says in an effort to soothe me. "Don't be angry."

"Me? I'm not. Why would I be?"

Because it's total bullshit? Yeah. Sounds about right. I may've done my fair share of dick-and-dash back in the day, but she's handling it all wrong. I was never rude about it, throwing it in the women's faces, telling them when I'm about to bed hop.

"I appreciate the offer, but you don't have to take me home, Hunter," she says, sitting on the edge of the bed and strapping on her heels. "I've walked through the forest a million times before, remember?"

I shove my feet into my boots. "I'll take you."

That came out wrong, my voice too rich and gravelly, the suggestion too obvious. But she nods anyway, her thin lips pressed together. As I steal the keys to Diesel's Camaro and lead Snow out into the storm, I can't help but wonder why the hell I agreed to this in the first place.

I must be a goddamn masochist.

Chapter Three

SNOW

“Hunter, would you please slow down?” I grab the oh-shit handle as Hunter takes the turn too fast. The hot rod loses traction and goes sideways as its wheels skid through the mud. “Why are you being like this?”

“Like what?” Gripping the wheel tight, he jerks it right and then left.

“You haven’t said more than two words since we left the lodge.”

Although the path I hike through the forest is a straight shot, the road to the estate is winding and long and will take at least fifteen minutes to travel, especially in the driving rain. As he hugs a sharp turn, water sprays up from the road, splashing the windshield.

“What do you want me to say?” He shifts hard, white-knuckling the knob. “I’m happy about your progress with this whole seduction playbook thing. That’s got to be, like, twenty words. Feel better?”

"I'm not upset about the number of words, jackass, but the way you're saying them. It's your tone. There's something wrong." I have to admit that some part of me is downright thrilled to know that I'm getting better at this whole seduction thing. Thanks to Hunter, of course. But I don't know what I did to upset him, and I don't want to leave things this way. "Talk to me."

He downshifts, banking right and then left. I slide over the leather, bracing against the console as I bite back a squeal. Whatever Diesel did to this car, it's working. The thing is hell on wheels.

"I didn't know you drove for NASCAR," I tease, keeping my gaze on the road.

He shoots me a glare that burns through the dark. "I'm getting you to Malcolm as quickly as possible. You can't become the center of his world if you're held captive in my bed."

He's right—I can't focus on getting to know Malcolm if I'm tangled in Hunter's sheets—but there's venom in his tone and I'm confused as hell. We're friends with benefits, and I haven't been stupid enough to think he'd want more. For him, this is win-win. All sex, no pressure.

I was starting to feel something back there, in his arms, his bed. And it spooked the hell out of me. For a heart-flicker, I wanted to stay, to cuddle up and spend the night. But in the morning light and the harsh glare of reality, I'd look like a fool who'd hoped for more, when he'd set it up as casual from the beginning.

I had to leave.

Hunter, more than anyone, should understand that. What on earth could he be upset about?

He stares straight forward, saying nothing, jaw clenched tight. As rain pummels the windshield, he turns the wipers on high speed. And then he floors the accelerator, taking the

rumble of the engine from a purr to a fierce roar.

I swipe my palms on my gown to dry off the sweat. "Did I piss off one of your buddies or something?"

"What?"

"Are they mad I kicked their ass at poker?"

"Hell no. Judging from the looks we got as we left, they're probably back at the lodge taking bets on who can make you squeal next. Dirty fuckers."

As the lights of the main house come into view, he slows—finally, thank the Lord—takes a wide turn around the driveway, and then parks in the shadows near the stables. There's a side entrance close by, with a staircase that goes straight up to my room—the one he would use when he'd come up to see me when I was grounded. Turning off the engine, he quiets the roar that's been echoing in my ears. The cab goes silent except for the hard pounding of my heart and the drumming rain on the heavy metal roof.

"Hunter..."

He won't look at me, and his chest is heaving as if he's having trouble getting air.

"Hunter, say something. Please?"

"If you want to go, now's your chance. There are still some lights on. Don't know what room your lover boy is in, but I'm sure he wouldn't mind an early wake-up call."

"He's not my..." His words swim through my head, drowning out my own thoughts.

Hunter couldn't be jealous...*could he?*

His anger and bitterness toward me right now would make sense if he were. But if Hunter doesn't want me long term, what reason would he have to be tied up in knots about my relationship—or lack thereof—with Malcolm?

"Thanks for the ride." A flare of stubbornness rears up inside me. Gazing out the passenger window, I watch fat drops dimple the glass. "If you want to hear how the second

rule plays out, you should come by for breakfast tomorrow morning. The whole pack will be there."

He doesn't say a word, so I slip out into the pouring rain and shove the door closed behind me. The rain is cold, slicking my skin, chilling me instantly. I'm dashing around the hood when the booming crash of the driver's door slamming shut startles me. A looming shadow marches around the car and meets me in front of the streaming headlights. It's Hunter, breathing hard, the severe angles of his face drenched in light and rain.

"You can't leave," he bites out, water streaming down his face. "Deep down, you know it's not what you want."

No, what I want is a man who'll sex me like Hunter and love me like forever, and the last part has always been a major hiccup for him. I want someone who's going to stick by my side and fight for my estate when things get ugly. I want someone who wants to be *here* and build something great with me. Not someone who's constantly searching for adventure as far away as he can get.

"What do I want, Hunter?" I fire, stepping closer, meeting him in the aura of headlights. "Tell me. I'd really like to know."

He closes the distance between us until I'm standing on tiptoe, my chest against his, staring into the depths of his dreamy blue eyes. "You want me to make all of your fantasies come true. You want me to challenge you and push you to your limit. It's why you came to me in the first place. It's why I'm not letting you leave until we're finished."

"First of all, I can leave whenever the hell I want." I let my threat linger, full and heavy, in the space between us. "Second, I didn't come to you so you could push my buttons. I wanted you to show me *how* to become a seductress."

"Right," he growls, "And you're not finished with your training. I'm not letting you go. Not until we're done."

In a flash of light and shadow, he grabs me and spins me

around, pinning my arms across my chest. I gasp from shock, not pain, as he hauls me against him, my back to his front. I'm trapped, my arms tangled in his, but I'm not trying to get free. When he's holding me this close, his breath on my neck, tingling on my flesh, the hard length of his erection pressing against my back, I'm not going anywhere.

"What's the third rule, then?" Exhilaration flares through my veins as the heat from his body radiates into mine. "Holding the person captive so they can't get away?"

"No, it's about getting down to who you really are and what you really want so you can experience true pleasure. But you're so used to controlling everything that you won't let go." As his grip on me loosens, he whispers, "You have to learn to submit. Only then, when your guard is down and you wholeheartedly trust the one you're with, will you realize the truth."

"What truth?" I lean back against him, my head resting on his shoulder.

"What you really want," he says, his voice like a caress against my ear, "is the fairy tale."

I chuckle tightly. "I don't remember Cinderella being taken this way."

"That's because Prince Charming lacked creativity." He plants a kiss on my shoulder and drags his lips over my sensitive flesh. Chills follow the path of his mouth as my heart thumps wildly in my chest, and when he speaks again, his voice gravelly and low, my eyes flutter closed. "What you really want, Snow, is someone who will treat you like a princess every single day of your life."

This. I want this.

As his mouth moves over my neck, I'm shaking, a puppet on a string, aching for his mouth to cover every inch of my quivering body. I pinch my eyes closed as mental images of a future with Hunter flash across the backs of my eyelids. It's a future where he'd cherish me every day, make me laugh at

inappropriate times, and fulfill my wildest fantasies.

My stomach pangs with the awful realization that it will never happen. He's too busy building a legacy in Hungary, Alaska, Iceland—God knows where else—and isn't staying.

I can't have this—*him*.

"But your nights—God, Snow, that's where you're different," he murmurs, his lips brushing against my earlobe. "You want someone who will spread your legs wide and pound into you in the middle of the fucking forest." Urging me forward, he bends my arms behind my back, traps my wrists in his hand, and pushes me down over the hood. He commands my body with pressure and promise rather than force. "You want someone who will possess your body and brand you with his scent so every other werewolf in the vicinity will know you belong to him."

God, yes.

"If you'll just submit to me," he says, his hips grinding against my backside, "I can show you what your body craves. But you have to say the words."

Adrenaline pulses through me, hot and fast, weakening my knees. I can't speak. Can't find the words to express how much I want him to take me from behind, right here, right now, in the middle of the rain, on the hood of this car.

"Yes." The sound escapes my lips on a pant.

"What was that?" Using the wet strands of my hair like a rein, he grasps a fistful and jerks back gently, lifting my head from the hood. And then, when I'm arched back, my mouth falling open, my heart drumming in my chest, his hand strokes my neck. "I couldn't quite hear you."

"I submit," I force out, and then he yanks my gown up over the curve of my backside, bunching it at my waist. The sound of a zipper hits my ears. He's undoing his pants, shoving them down. I bite my lower lip to repress a whimper of pleasure and come back with the metallic taste of blood. "I

submit to you..."

I gasp, sucking in fat drops of rain, as tingles of sensation dance through me. Bent over the hood this way, I'm exposed, vulnerable, and immediately drenched from the rain streaming between my cheeks.

"Tonight, I want you trembling," he says, his voice a low rasp against my ear. "Unable to think about anything but the orgasm just beyond your reach."

His fingers dart between my legs and sweep through my heat, bringing me closer and closer to that brink. The swollen length of his erection presses against my inner thigh as he urges my legs apart, and I gasp at the contact, wanting him inside me, stretching me to the fullest.

"I want you aching." He swirls his fingers over my pleasure spot, groaning in approval when I squirm against him. "*Begging* for it."

"*Begging*, yes."

I'm already there, sagging against the hood and quivering from head to toe. He licks up my spine, from where my dress is bunched at my waist to the nape of my neck, kissing my arms as he presses over them. His mouth is hot, his lips soft, and as his whole body weighs down mine, I tilt my hips up.

Take me.

As if he hears my silent plea, he grips my ass in his hands, spreads gently, and...he goes still, a rumble of possessiveness vibrating from his chest. "Fuck, Snow, what are you doing to me? I can't hold back another second."

And then he drives forward, all the way in. He lets out a deep, throaty moan as his hips meet mine, and he stills, balls deep.

Hissing through clenched teeth, I arch up and push back, tilting my hips for him to thrust deeper still. Hands kneading the flesh of my rear, he withdraws from my heat painstakingly slowly and then thrusts in again. Harder this time, with so

much force that his hips slam me against the hood.

I'm speared with pleasure, whimpering as he rides me hard, dominating my body, fucking me rather than making love.

"You're a good girl, but a part of you just wants to be fucked." Leaning over me, resting his weight on my back, he reaches around, jerks down my top, and pinches my nipples, twisting and turning until I wince from the pain. "Mastered. Claimed."

Words escape my lips in a mumbled rush as he dominates my body, driving in and out of my slick heat, harder, faster, stretching me completely. He smacks my ass, and pain splinters through me, causing my chest to lift off the hood. When he spansks me again, numbness spreads across my cheeks, followed by pinpricks of pleasure.

"Yes." I weave my fingers together, clutching tight, overcome with the blistering sensations of the rain and heat, the brutal force of his cock, and the orgasm rising inside me. "Don't stop."

I'm immobile, unable to touch him with my hands. Unable to see him through the fan of dark hair covering my face. Unable to smell anything but the rain and the spilled oil from the engine beneath me.

But I *feel* the strength of his body and the rising peak of his desire as if it's my own. His cock twitches inside me, jerking and swelling, and it's *everything*.

He bangs into me, pinching my nipples, gripping my ass, a man possessed as he brings me closer and closer to climax until—*oh holy fuck*—the orgasm screams through my core, pulsing and clenching and clutching his shaft. I cry out his name over and over again as starbursts of light explode behind my eyes and pleasure and pain blend into one.

Groaning, bending over me, pounding into my still-clenching depths, he reaches between my legs. "You're not

his,” he hisses, his thrusts becoming erratic. “Not right now. Now you’re *mine*. Say it. Say you want my cum to fill you up.”

“I want...” The words stick in the back of my throat as his hips crash against mine. “Fill me up...”

He sheathes himself so deeply, pain splinters through my middle, piggybacked by the most intense pleasure I’ve ever felt.

“*Beg me*,” he purrs.

“Please, Hunter...*please*.”

As he strokes his thumb over my throbbing clit, I come again, the second orgasm slamming into me harder than the first.

“Yours—I’ve always been yours. Oh my—*God*, Hunter.” My core pulses against his cock. “Brand me. I’m yours.”

Squeezing my waist, he thrusts once, twice, and as a low throaty moan vibrates the air, he rams home, so blissfully deep I scream his name into the night.

“You’re so hot, Snow, so fucking hot.” And then he erupts into my depths, jerking forcefully, clutching my hips to hold me in place. His release seems to go on for minutes, filling me up, warming me from the inside out, his scent marking my flesh.

When the orgasm wanes, he releases my wrists, spins me around and kisses me. His lips are tender and soft, causing butterflies to flutter through my middle. A smile sparks on my lips, but—*what the ever-loving fuck am I doing?*

My heart catches.

He can’t *brand* me—why the hell did I ask him to do that? He doesn’t want to go through the werewolf bonding process with me or anyone. In fact, if I sift through my orgasm-induced haze, he specifically said, “You’re mine *right now*.” As in, this moment, in the throes of ecstasy, nothing permanent.

Can’t get clearer than that.

“Hunter...” I felt too much, put too much emotion into

something that was clearly physical on his end. Nothing more. “What I said before, about you branding me—”

“You didn’t mean to say it that way,” he finishes for me. “You went too far; I get it. You don’t need to explain.” He squeezes my hand reassuringly, though pain sparks in his eyes. “I said you would realize the truth, and you did. We have an intense physical connection, unlike anything I’ve ever felt before.”

He feels it, too.

“But the reality is,” he goes on too quickly, squashing any hope that might’ve sprung up inside me, “what you want and what you need are two different things.”

My mind reels as I hang on his every word. It’s as if my future depends on this very moment.

“We both know the bottom line.” He pulls me into his arms and guides my head to his chest. “As much as I want you and you want me, I could never be what you need, not when my work takes me so far from here. There’s no future for us.”

Wow.

Hearing it that way, from his lips plain as day, pierces my heart. I’ve known from the start that the deal with Hunter was a one-time thing. Even if we’ve exploited the physical aspect of our relationship, it was never supposed to develop into something more. Why then, are his words ringing in my head, souring the memories of our time together?

“Snow?” he asks, looking down at me. “Are you okay? You went still as stone just now.”

“Me? Yeah, I’m fine.” Or, I will be once my heart and my head are in tune. “So, what’s your plan?”

“If you want to head upstairs, I’ll wait for your light to turn on before driving back to the lodge.” He brushes the back of his hand down my cheek. If I didn’t know better, I’d say his touch is filled with reverence. “But if you want to come back with me, we can continue this until morning. We’ll have

one last night with no pressure, guilt, or expectation before your birthday tomorrow, when you'll be weighed down with more expectation than you know what to do with. I'll give you everything I have to offer—one final night you won't forget."

After this, it's over. Done. I swear to make more of an effort to fall for guys who actually *want* to spend a lifetime with me.

One more night.

"Do you think Diesel would mind if I drove this time?"

Chapter Four

SNOW

Sunday morning broke way too early, especially since I'm running on an hour of sleep. Even then, Hunter's hands were all over me, skimming over the dip in my waist, gripping my hips, sweeping between my legs.

I didn't mind, not in the slightest.

Being with him this morning was the best birthday present ever. It was the perfect way to start this day, the one that begins the next phase of my life. In a few short hours, I'll be Alpha. There'll be challenges of course, but I'm ready. I've been ready since the day my mother passed away, leaving my father, and then my stepmother, filling my role temporarily. Until today, when I reclaim what's rightfully mine—the privilege to rule, passed along through the maternal lines of my family.

As I weave through the forest from his cabin to my estate, birds swoop overhead and follow my path, chirping and singing. Western gray squirrels scamper through shrubs

nearby. In the distance, a mule deer hides behind the trees yet watches me carefully as I trek through his territory. Rays of morning light stream through the canopy, causing a kaleidoscope of color to settle on the forest floor. Blues and greens, yellows and reds—it's almost magical. The longer I walk, the lighter my step, and the warmer my heart becomes.

Hunter has somehow rejuvenated me from the inside out. I feel illuminated, as if I'm bursting with light and love. It has everything to do with the way Hunter makes me feel when I'm in his arms, when he holds me tightly against him, when he gazes deep into my eyes and kisses me tenderly. He's always brought out the quiriness in me when others thought I was plain, boring, or too innocent to have a dark, playful side. With him, I'm the best version of myself.

Even as his words echo through my head—*there's no future for us*—I can't help but feel like he's helped me learn more about the kind of woman I want to be. I'm going to take this feeling and pour all of myself into my next relationship—one that'll hopefully last forever.

When I finally reach the edge of the forest and my home comes into view, I slow my pace and scope out my surroundings. Wolves of all shapes, colors, and sizes pepper the landscape.

Near my horse stables, two packmates are deep in a heated mindspeak conversation about which man the bachelorette is going to pick on tonight's finale. They're not spooking the horses—by now, they're used to it—but they might be spooking the single males in the bunch. Across the grounds and to my right, a group of newly transitioned wolves gathers around a hunting guide and ready to head out for the morning. In the garden, female wolves measure whose hindquarters are leaner than the rest.

This weekend is one of the only times we can truly be ourselves, free to shift into wolf form whenever we feel like

it. Thanks to our estate, wolves in the White Wolf Pack have sanctuary three days a month, when the shifting energy of the moon is at its peak.

This morning, though, I can't think about shifting.

Hunter is still on my mind, right at the forefront.

I don't know what comes over me when I'm around him. It's not that I'm a different person when I'm with him—no, that's not it at all. I'm simply a different, sexier, hotter version of myself. I'm starting to really like the new me. There's no pressure. No one judging me. It's liberating as hell.

Now I simply need to be carefree and sexy with a guy who actually wants to love me and settle down.

Someone like Malcolm Taylor.

If I could manage more than a few minutes with him without getting tongue-tied or acting like a giddy schoolgirl, maybe I'd find out what *he* truly wants.

"Happy Birthday, Snow." My stepmother greets me at the front door, her tone much too shrill for his early hour.

"Thanks. It's a big day."

"It is. Where have you been? I was about to send out the search party."

I lower my gaze so she can't see the blush that's been creeping there from the moment I started thinking about Hunter again. "After dinner, I went to visit Hunter and stayed up late talking with his friends."

"They're reunited and back in the party scene, are they?" She sneers, detaching her gaze from mine as she sips on her Bloody Mary. "All seven of them?"

My thoughts turn to Diesel and his Camaro, Cash dealing cards, J.D. serving up drinks, Harley gushing about his bike, Rocky and Goliath in wolf form on the back porch, and Hunter—oh, that man is sex on a stick.

"What a dysfunctional band of brothers." Her lips twist into a dissatisfied pout. "The seven *deviants*, all together

again.”

Only they're not dysfunctional or deviant. If she only spent time with them, she'd know for herself. Beyond the giant archway to my right, the dining room is being set for breakfast.

“Actually,” I counter, turning left to stride upstairs, “they were complete gentlemen. Once the storm hit, Hunter thought it'd be smarter for me to stay the night. Wasn't that thoughtful?”

“I didn't get to see him at the party Friday night.” She spins around, following me, ignoring my question. “He must've caught the eye of someone special and took off.”

He caught my eye.

Does she know he touched me in the kitchen closet? How could she possibly? Did the staff hear my moans of pleasure and rat us out? Anxiety quickens my pulse as I take the stairs two at a time.

“I bet he's back to business as usual,” my stepmother goes on, her voice eerily close behind me. “Don't you remember? He'd show up to our parties, stay for a few minutes, just long enough to charm the skirt off of someone new, and then *poof*—he'd be gone.”

“Yeah.” I force my tone to go flat as I turn down the red-carpeted halls toward my room. “I remember.”

Always the playboy, the sexual manipulator. Hunter was the one everyone wanted and no one could pin down.

His words spiral through my head: *What you want and what you need are two different things.*

“Some things never change, I suppose.” Behind me, she chomps into her celery stick and chews loudly. “Speaking of change, I thought we might talk before breakfast is served this morning.”

“Can't it wait?” I push through my bedroom door and spin, cutting her off with a hand braced on the doorjamb

before she follows me inside. "I'd really like to get out of this dress."

"You can do what you need to," she says, ducking under my arm, "while I talk."

Can't she take a hint?

Keeping my gaze off hers, I disappear into my closet as she perches on the edge of my bed. She doesn't waste any time digging in.

"How'd it go with Malcolm?" she prods.

Is she talking about the first time we met, when he confused me for an employee? Or the second time, in his room, when I completely humiliated myself by shoving a banana in my face?

"I saw you talking," she goes on, "but only briefly. I assume you were able to get better acquainted later in the evening?"

"Oh, didn't you hear? Malcolm is in love with me already." I slip out of my gown and step into a pale-yellow wrap dress that crisscrosses over my chest. It has a plunging neckline that accentuates my breasts, and I can already imagine the way Hunter would bury his face in the crevice, licking and sucking his way up to my neck, my mouth. "He proposed last night after everyone went to sleep. We're getting married tomorrow morning. Hope you can make it last minute."

"You think you're funny?" My stepmother's voice is void of humor, or any kind of emotion, really. The crisp sound of paper crumpling registers in my ears. "I don't think you understand how much trouble we're in. We don't have time to play games, Snow. I received a letter from the bank yesterday."

Damn it.

I peek around the corner and catch her staring at the letter clutched in her spindly fingers. "If we don't do something, we'll lose all of this. Did Malcolm take to you?"

"You mean like a fungus?"

"You know what I mean. Did you *try*?" She narrows her

eyes at me. "Because I know how you can get. If you would just use the assets you have—if you would play them up, tie your hair back, sway your hips a little, pout when you talked—he'd fall for you, I know it. You are the fairest in the land, Snow. If he's not dying to be at your side twenty-four-seven, you're not trying hard enough to nail him."

Groaning, I emerge from the closet and head straight toward the bathroom to fluff life back into my hair. "I was on board with doing what I could to get his attention, and learning what I could to seduce him, but that was only to get him alone, where we could talk, so I could see if we were compatible and could have a future together. You make this whole thing sound...dirty, as if I'm using him to save the place and that's the only thing I want from him."

"But you two *are* compatible. I've told you so." Suddenly she's standing in the doorway behind me, staring disapprovingly at my reflection in the mirror. "He wants a marriage with a woman he loves, and little werewolf ankle-biters running around. He dreams of having the kind of life his parents had—the kind your father and I had before he died."

It's true that she and my father seemed happy during their short marriage, but not as happy as he'd been with my mother, the true Alpha of our pack. Where my mother believed there was beauty in everything, even tiny, simple things, my stepmother seems to put more value on newer, shinier objects. Larger diamonds. Luxury cars. Designer furniture. She's always been high-maintenance and never hid the fact. Looking back, I can see the damage it caused their relationship. My father loved her, it's true, but her excessive spending created a strain she didn't bother to see.

"I want everything Malcolm wants," I say, "but honestly, I still have questions about his motives."

"What the devil do you mean?"

I sweep my hair into a ponytail, pull down a few dark, wispy strands, and then talk with bobby pins caught between my lips. “There’s one thing that’s still not meshing in my head. Why would Malcolm, the CEO of a major jewelry company based out of New York, want to return here, to the Pacific Northwest, to find a mate? Why wouldn’t he just join a pack over there, where his business is rooted? Doesn’t make sense.”

“Why don’t you ask him over breakfast?” She shrugs as if walking up to someone as handsome and filthy-freaking-rich as Malcolm Taylor is the easiest thing in the world to do. How is she not intimidated by him? “Truth is, Snow, time is running out, and the key to our—*your* future happiness is down there, waiting for you to talk to him.”

Going back to that attention-getting thing—what did Hunter say about executing the second rule of seduction?

Get into his inner circle, around his friends, and make them love me. He’ll be jealous as hell. Hold eye contact and imagine everyone is screwing me.

That last part doesn’t sound right, but that’s what he said, wasn’t it? How does he expect me to think straight when every single one of his lessons ends with my brains being screwed out?

“I will,” I say with a nod. “I’ll go down there right now.”

I’ll figure out once and for all—without humiliating myself completely—if Malcolm is as flawless in person as he is on paper.

Please let him be perfect.

I’m not going to lie: if Malcolm is as amazing as I think he is, the timing would be impeccable, and solve everything. I can’t get my hopes up, though. Nothing ever works out this seamlessly. Not for me anyway.

The trek downstairs is a sensory overload. Packmates smile and wave as they pass by on the way to their rooms to change for breakfast. Classical piano tunes, light and airy, waft

from somewhere in the living room. The oily, crispy-delicious aroma of bacon frying tingles through my nose. When I hit the bottom of the stairs, I search through the crowd for Malcolm.

It doesn't take long to spot him. Every stream of morning light is trained on the gorgeous angles of his face, highlighting his wide nose, strong jaw, and almond-shaped eyes. Barely under six feet tall, the hunky Hemsworth-look-alike has blond hair that's parted down the center, smoothed on the sides, and pulled back into a ponytail. He's wearing black slacks and a summer-sky-blue polo shirt that matches the hue of his eyes.

As he pulls out the chair of the blonde to his right, the redhead to his left drapes her arm over his shoulder in a possessive move that gets his attention. He whispers something in her ear, and she smiles in that coy way I can never pin down.

I had a chance with him and blew it.

How am I going to get him alone again? He goes everywhere with the bimbo squad, and I'm not going to crash *that* inner circle anytime soon. I mean, how am I supposed to—

His gaze flips to mine.

I freeze, my foot hovering over the bottom stair. Swallow hard. Grip the banister tight.

Now's my chance.

I put Hunter's second instruction to the test and give Malcolm my very best sultry stare. I bat my eyelashes in slow motion, channeling Marilyn Monroe or any other Hollywood harlot, and imagine him on top of me, his hips grinding against mine, his shaft swelling inside me. A breathy sigh escapes my lips and—*ouch, goddamn it*—the eyelashes on my right eye stick together. I blink quickly, trying to force them to split. It doesn't work. No one would switch the mascara in the tube for superglue, but damn if it doesn't feel like it.

Malcolm winks and then smiles slowly.

Good God, he thinks I just winked at him.

And I'm *mortified*.

Turning around with a jolt, I peel my eyelashes apart with my finger and my thumb. When I turn back, he's whispering something to Blondie, who frowns and then meets my eyes.

Lifting my hand in a shy wave, I step off the stair, but my heel catches. I'm tumbling, falling toward the hardwood just like last night. *Shit*. Thinking fast, I slide my other foot out in front and almost do the splits before catching myself, one hand on the bottom of the railing, the other on the floor.

I'll stop my own damn fall, thank you very much.

"Watch your step," Malcolm says, meeting me at my side. "Someone spilled a mimosa here earlier, and I think the floor might still be slippery."

He offers a hand to guide me, but I shake my head to decline.

I've got this.

"It was probably my stepmother." I stride toward the table, ready to take my seat at the end reserved for losers. "Sometimes I swear she's trying to kill me." And then I laugh, because the thought strikes me as absolutely ridiculous. We have our differences, and different views on how the estate should be run, but on the daily, we get along fine.

As we reach the end of the table, Malcolm snatches two apples from the fruit plate and gestures toward the front door. "Do you think they'd mind if I stole the birthday girl away? Just for a moment?"

Oooh, I'm intrigued. As long as he's not going to ask me to fix his toilet again because, eww.

"Not at all."

Hope streaks through me as I wait for him to join me at the edge of the porch. I try to stay cool, unbothered, as if talking to someone who owns a freaking city block in Manhattan is no biggie.

“What’s up?” I say.

He stands beside me, staring out over the garden.

“Apple?”

“Sure.”

I’ve substituted sex for food lately, and while I wouldn’t mind keeping that up, my stomach is growling fiercely, and if I don’t feed the monster soon, people will start to hear.

I take the apple and bite through its skin, relishing the sweetness.

He eats in silence for a long while—so long I’m worried he’s not going to speak at all. When he does, his voice is rich and smooth, commanding. “When you invited yourself up to my room the other night, I assumed we would have a few drinks, and get to know each other.”

“We did. The Crown was delicious.”

“I thought you would stay longer than ten minutes.”

Wow, he’s direct, cutting right through the bullshit. Probably why he’s so successful.

“Malcolm,” I say, my attention locked on the spot in the driveway where Hunter bent me over the hood. “How long do you plan to stay here?”

“At least a few more minutes.”

“No, I mean in the area.” Because if he’s going to shoot straight, I am, too. I don’t ever want to leave my father’s estate. It’s been my home my entire life. I’m proud of what he’s built, of what he’s given me. I wouldn’t trade this life for anything. If Malcolm is planning to head back to New York, I can stop thinking about him. “I heard a rumor that you wanted to move out of Manhattan.”

A part of me wants the rumor to be true. I don’t know why—it’s not like I have any other prospects for a long and happy love life with anyone else.

He steps in front of me, severing my view of my special parking spot. “That’s a difficult question to answer. Before

last month, I hadn't given a single thought to coming this weekend. I've missed more full-moon festivities than I've attended—I have my business to thank for that. But when your stepmother called and said you were interested in hooking up, I—”

“Wait, wait, hold up.” I couldn't have heard right. Squinting, as if that'll improve my hearing, I say, “Come again?”

His full lips pull up into a gorgeous grin before taking another bite of apple. “She said you were—how did she put it?—looking to let loose this weekend. She sent a few pictures of you, but the quality was so poor I couldn't recognize you, even when you were standing in front of me last night.”

I can't think straight when I'm staring into his brooding eyes so I close mine, but I focus hard on what he's saying. “My stepmother sent pictures of me? To you? And said I was interested in...letting loose?”

“That's right.”

Air whooshes in and out of my lungs as my chest goes cold. This isn't making sense. “Why would she do that?” I whisper, asking myself more than Malcolm.

“Because she said you were shy. That you wanted to connect with me in Manhattan but didn't feel comfortable leaving the estate.” He pauses, gauging my reaction, before going on. “She played up your beauty in the emails, but now that I've seen you close up, in the firelight last night and in the rays of the sun this morning, I realize she didn't do you justice. Your hair isn't only dark—it's black as ebony and smooth and silky like a rein. Your skin is flawless, without a single blemish, but it's white as snow and probably just as soft. And your lips...they're red as blood.”

“She sent you pictures of me.” It's no longer a question, but a confused statement.

He nods.

“I'm sorry—please excuse me.” I charge down the steps

and into the garden, around potted shrubs and flowering trees, down cobblestone pathways lined with the silver leaves and blue-violet flowers of the Broadleaf Lupine plant. I toss my unfinished apple into a bin on my right and then turn abruptly toward a flowering arch leading toward the forest.

"Snow," he calls, following me down the path. "Where are you going?"

"I don't know, but I have to think. Walking helps."

"If you're upset with your stepmother, you shouldn't be." He runs to my side and matches my pace. "It was flattering to know you had a secret crush on me."

I stop in my tracks. He continues a few steps and then turns back, tossing the apple high in the air and catching it again.

"She shouldn't have emailed you. It wasn't her place." But she'd written the truth. I've had a crush on Malcolm for years. Blood pumps hot through my veins at the thought of being so exposed. "She should've minded her own business."

"She assured me that she only wants what is best for you."

Sure, but the first words out of her mouth when she realized Malcolm would be staying at the estate this weekend were focused on what he could do for our debt rather than how happy he would make me. Hooking up or "letting loose" with Malcolm is beneficial for her, too. I can't ignore that little nugget of truth. If I marry Malcolm—her end game—the estate and our home will be saved.

She knew he would be here this weekend. She invited him, telling him I wanted to hook up with him and... Wait.

He came.

After all these years of declined invitations, he showed up.

"Snow, I'd like to be completely honest with you." He closes the distance between us, holding my gaze, his thumb stroking the gentle curve of the apple. "Can I tell you

something? Without judgment?"

I nod, though the notion doesn't feel right. Now that I think of it, my body doesn't feel like my own. My skin is too tight for my bones. My feet are floating, hovering inches above the ground. Thoughts jumble in my mind, clogging the logic that's trying to root there.

"I came to meet you," he says, his voice low and dark, "because as much as I love New York, it is not my home. *This* is my home, and I'd like to return some day, expand the business and work at the local store. And then, when the time is right, get married and have children. I'm tired of the party life, the buzz of the city, and the revolving door of superficial women who spin in and out of my life. I'm ready to find the right one. I don't care if that sounds cheesy."

He's saying all the things I've longed to hear. Checking all the right boxes. He's so freaking good-looking and charming and kind. His hair is golden, his shoulders broad and strong. He's as perfect as I thought he'd be...well, I still don't know what he's working with below the belt, but there's still time to figure that out.

And I'm staring with my mouth open.

Clamping it shut, I nod as if I've been listening the whole time instead of ogling. "It's not cheesy. It's romantic."

"You wouldn't believe how many cynics are out there." His eyes burn with such intensity, I have to look away. "There are so many people who've abandoned the search for their fated mate and are simply looking for their next greatest adventure."

Hunter.

His name streaks through my head like a firework, exploding brightly through the orgasm-induced fog clouding my brain. He wants nothing more than hot, drive-me-crazy, burn-the-sheets sex. He's unapologetic about his philandering, and for the last two days, his sights have been set on me.

But that's over now.

He'll leave tomorrow and find someone new. Search for the next woman to pleasure senseless. A hollow ache blooms through my chest at the thought.

It's more than the soul-shattering sex, believe it or not.

The woman he finds next will get to laugh with him, tease him, and spend the whole night in his arms. She'll get to hear his heartbeat when she rests her head on his chest. As stupid as it sounds, I'm jealous of the *time* she'll spend with him more than anything.

For the last five years, I've missed my friend. And now, when he leaves again, I'll miss my lover.

"I know a few people like that," I say, my voice catching, "but I'm looking for my fated mate, too. Someone I can laugh with and grow old with. Someone who is my very best friend. I want a mate I can talk to and trust. I need an emotional and intellectual connection. Our future goals should mesh, our view of financial values and—"

"What about sex?"

"Sex?"

He nods slowly, his gaze lingering on my mouth. "Where does that fit in?"

"It, ah..." I'm taken off guard, unable to keep my eyes on his as I shift my feet on the cobblestone path. "That's important, too."

"The way I see it, all of those things you just mentioned—morals and values and the ability to trust the other person—are at the core of a relationship." Bringing the apple to his mouth, he takes a tantalizingly slow bite, right through to the center. When he's finished chomping, he swipes his tongue across his bottom lip, and I can't help but think how sweet his mouth would taste. "Sexual chemistry is the meat of the apple—the most succulent part. This sweet juice is what keeps you coming back for more. You wouldn't want to *eat* the hard,

morally-solid core,” he says, drawing out the final words, “because that’s not the part that satisfies your hunger.”

Damn, Malcolm is sex on a stick.

I’m sweating, quivering beneath the weight of his stare. And now I can’t stop thinking about him licking other things besides that apple core.

“I, ah...” I clear my throat. “I’ve never thought of it that way.”

“On paper, you’re exactly the woman I’m looking for, Snow. But I had to know if we had chemistry, and coming this weekend to meet you in person was the only way to figure that out.”

And I was mistaken for the plumber. *Nice.*

“At first, I wasn’t sure about you,” he goes on, stepping closer still, until he’s towering over me, the heat of his body radiating across the space between us. Rays of yellow-orange sunlight slash over his face, illuminating the hard angles of his cheekbones and sexy curve of his lips, and it takes my breath away. “When you ran out of my room as if your panties were on fire, I packed my bags and changed my flight to leave first thing this morning. But then, I saw you.”

Of course he saw me. In his room, just as he said. What’s he talking about?

He doesn’t go on or explain.

I narrow my eyes at him, though, I’m still imaging his tongue on my nether region, so I can’t be expected to think clearly. “I don’t think I’m tracking what you’re saying. You saw *what*, exactly?”

Snaking an arm around my back, he drags me against him. I suck in a shocked breath as my body bends to his, molding to his muscular form. He’s hard and hot, his arms coiling around my waist in a forcible grasp.

“I saw you and Hunter. On the hood of that car.”

Oh shit.

I've gone cold. I can't breathe. I'm shaking in his arms.

"And I have to say," he continues, tilting his head, eyeing my mouth from a different angle, "I didn't peg you as the type who'd be into that. I thought you were innocent and pure, but you're far from it."

Great. He's disgusted and going to blab to the pack about what happened. My reputation will be in the gutter, and my stepmother will have yet another reason to disapprove of my life.

"How..." I swallow hard, and as he watches my neck, hunger burns in his eyes. "How much did you see?"

"Everything." Holding one arm behind my back, he skates the other to my neck and strokes his thumb beneath my jaw. "I saw him bend you over the hood, spank you and ride you hard, and from the sound of your screams, I'd say you enjoyed being fucked as much as I liked watching it."

Good. God.

As his thumb presses into the small indentation at the base of my neck, the air hiccups in my lungs. He's eyeing me curiously, as if he's trying to figure out a puzzle, but lust flares in his eyes.

I can't speak as I drop my head back and gaze up at him.

"Did you like being fucked that way?" he asks, nearly growling the words.

I nod because the words won't come.

"Did you like being spanked?"

Again, I nod as desire floods my veins like adrenaline. I don't know what's come over me. It's as if Malcolm has hypnotized me, spellbinding me with his undeniable sex appeal. His voice calls to me, tugging on something deep inside my middle, and his scent is like an aphrodisiac. Closing my eyes, I breathe in the rich and earthy smell of him, the sandalwood and musk undertones, and lose myself, just a for a moment.

He's charming, totally perfect, *and* oozing sex appeal. No wonder he can have any woman he wants.

"What else do you like?" His hand grazes up and down my back, leaving a trail of gooseflesh behind. "Suspension? Choke play?"

His fingers close around my throat, adding a little pressure, promising what would happen if I said yes. I swallow heavily once more and drag my gaze to his.

"I've never tried those things," I fight out.

"But you want to."

"With the right person, with someone I trust, I suppose I might."

"And what would it take," he continues, his gaze searching my face, "to earn your trust?"

"I'd have to know the person has my best interests at heart. They'd have to know what causes me pleasure and pain, understand my heart and what makes me tick." My stomach tumbles. "And they'd have to respect my boundaries, taking me right to the edge without pushing too far."

A sound of understanding comes from his throat as his eyes darken. "Although I respect you completely, we haven't known each other nearly long enough to have that kind of relationship."

"No," I say softly, "we haven't."

It's the reason I wanted to get closer to him this weekend. To know if he could be the one I'd spend the rest of my life with. "If you come inside with me now, I can learn those things about you." He leans down, his mouth hovering over mine as he presses his thumb against my throat. "Will you let me discover every gorgeous inch of you? Because I want to, Snow. I want to know all of you, in every way."

Yes, yes, yes, God yes.

Hunter's name streaks through my head, but only for a moment and then it's gone, flashing quickly before fading into

the darkness. Malcolm's grasp is too warm and enveloping, the scent from his body too inviting, the promise of his kiss too strong for me to think about anything else.

This was what I wanted from the start.

What I *needed*.

My heart thumps in time with his words as he moves toward my ear and whispers, "If you let me, I'll pleasure you until you're begging me to stop, just so you can catch your breath again. I want you hot and dirty, tied up and bent over, just the way you were last night with him."

Hunter.

Heat bores into the side of my face, as if someone is watching us.

"Will you give yourself to me, Snow?" Malcolm sucks on my earlobe. "I'll test your boundaries, push your limits, and this time, when the orgasm tears through you, *my* name will be the one on your hot fucking mouth. Just say the word."

There is no future for us.

What you want isn't what you need.

"Say yes, Snow." Malcolm kisses my neck, slow and hot, and moves up my chin. As my eyes flutter closed, I turn toward him, toward the sound of his voice. "I can give you everything you want...everything you need. Just say it."

Everything I need...

My heart hiccups as I take the leap. "Yes."

On the word, he crushes a bruising kiss to my lips. I whimper against the force of his mouth, but when his tongue slips inside, I go languid in his arms, defenseless against the onslaught of sensations spiking in my core.

Tunneling his fingers through my hair, he draws me into him, until he's kissing me harder, breathing in my air and plunging his tongue so deliciously deep into my throat. It's a kiss of possession and greed, as if my body alone will satiate his need. I'm jittery inside, losing control as something snaps

in my middle. I coil my arms around his neck and meet him stroke for eager stroke, sliding my tongue through his mouth, against his cheek, before sucking on his lower lip and pulling back.

He growls from deep within his chest and digs his fingers into my hips as he presses me against him. A long, hard rod grinds against my stomach, giving me the answer I've wondered about all along.

He's *huuuuge*.

Warmth blooms over my face, radiating through my chest as I pull back. Someone is watching everything. I can feel their eyes on me — us.

Turning, I search the estate, from the building to the garden, the forest over Malcolm's shoulder.

There.

Hunter.

He's posted up on the edge of the tree line, crouching as if he's ready to pounce, his eyes narrowed to slits. Horror slams through me at the realization of what he's just witnessed. This was the plan, the goal, the reason we've been sexing it up in the first place. But I taste guilt on my tongue, vile and bitter.

My gaze flips to Malcolm and back to Hunter as indecision wars within me.

This was the freaking plan. Learn how to seduce Malcolm without being all over him.

Check.

Make him crazy jealous by using others.

Double check.

It worked.

Letting Hunter bend me over the hood drove Malcolm crazy, enticing him, drawing him closer, but now...

"What do you say, Snow?" Malcolm presses me against him, until I can't get any closer. "Ready for the best sex of your life?"

Yeah, but didn't I already have it—with Hunter?

Could it *really* get better?

The future I've always wanted, with the billionaire of my dreams, is right in front of me, waiting for me to reach out and grab it. But why do I get the feeling I'm going to screw up my relationship with Hunter in the process?

"Fuck," I mumble out loud.

"Yeah." Malcolm grips my ass in both hands. "That's the plan."

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SNOW WHITE'S SURRENDER

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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To Justin
For dreaming with me.

Chapter One

SNOW

SOMEWHERE IN THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST
WHITE WOLF PACK

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,” I whisper, walking toward the standing mirror in Malcolm’s private chamber, “please tell me—oh, why the hell am I talking to a piece of glass?”

It’s not as if my reflection is going to stare back at me and say, “You’ve slept with your best friend, had the best sex of your life, and now might’ve messed up everything with the guy of your dreams. Good luck wiggling your way out of this one.”

.It’d be right on the money, though.

My best friend Hunter and I were inseparable throughout childhood and adolescence, especially during our first transition as wolves. We’d take off into the forest, two stupid kids, shifting and hunting and exploring our newfound strength and speed together. I can be myself around him whether I’m

managing my late father's business—the White Estate, a bed and breakfast that's seen better days—or rebelling against my stepmother and escaping to the forest to blow off steam.

But five years ago he moved away to find adventure and started flipping ski lodges around the world. When he left, Hunter was a total playboy, without a care in the world or a penny to his name.

Now?

He's still a total playboy without a care in the world...and he's leaving after I'm declared Alpha tonight. He can't stay in one place long. Never could.

He hasn't changed.

Serial flirt. Modern-day Casanova. Adventure hound.

All those years, we never veered out of the friend zone. No, all it took was one misunderstanding two nights ago. This weekend, the entire pack gathered for the full moon festivities to witness my declaration as Alpha of the pack. Friday night at the masquerade ball, I mistook Hunter for Malcolm Taylor, billionaire jeweler from New York City. I wanted to steal a few minutes alone with him. Seduce him a little, or a lot. See if we were compatible. But I fell under Hunter's sex-spell—okay, I know he's not magical or anything, but damn—and now I can't get enough of his body or the orgasms that ripple through me when he's near.

My stepmother thinks my marrying the jeweler from New York is the only way we can save our estate from the debt it's fallen under. I'm not going to marry someone based solely on whether or not he can get us out of foreclosure. But I can't deny Malcolm is one of the most eligible bachelors in the country. He's intelligent, business-savvy, and harnesses the undeniable charisma of a man who gets everything he wants.

I simply need to know if he's as perfect in person as he is on paper.

Malcolm closes his bedroom door and approaches my

back as I stare in the mirror. His golden-blond hair is parted down the center and tied back into a ponytail, accentuating the sharpness of his cheekbones and the full curve of his lips. Broad shoulders taper to a muscular chest and narrow waist, and I know from the feel of his erection when he ground his hips against mine earlier, he's working with something colossal.

"You haven't said more than two words since we left the garden." Malcolm's voice is smooth and rich, like liquid honey, and my nerves spark to full alert. "Judging from your midnight display, I know you're not shy. You must be curious."

About him? Hell yes.

It's the reason I went to Hunter for seduction lessons in the first place—to capture Malcolm's attention. Everywhere he goes, he's escorted by two gorgeous women—the Bimbo Squad, as I call them—and is more handsome than a Hemsworth in Thor gear.

"I don't know what to say." In my reflection, my gaze lowers to the yellow patterned dress clinging to my curves. "After the way I behaved with you the other night, I didn't think you'd invite me back."

"Yes," he says, smirking. "The banana."

"The banana," I parrot, fighting off the wave of humiliation flooding through me. Taking a deep breath, I spin around slowly and look up at him. "Can we just forget that ever happened?"

"Not a snowball's chance in hell." He bursts out laughing, holding his stomach as if he's tied up inside. "I'll never forget that, not for as long as I live. I've never seen someone demolish a fruit that way. You broke the shaft right off."

And now I can't help but laugh, too. Hunter's first rule of seduction backfired. Big time. He told me to become the physical lure, glancing at Malcolm from afar, talking slowly and eating seductively to draw attention to my mouth. But

I'm awkward when I'm nervous, and Hunter didn't take that into account. So when Malcolm invited me up to his room for a nightcap, I grabbed a banana off a fruit plate and tried to become the seductress Hunter had trained me to be.

I'd choked on too big of a bite—broke the fruit in half. The thick piece of banana meat dropped to the floor with a thud, dragging my hopes of seducing Malcolm along with it.

Not sexy. At all.

"Okay, okay," I say, smacking him in the chest. "I tried to be sexy, but it didn't work."

"You pinched my foot."

I nod, blush heating my cheeks. "I did that, too." *But only because Hunter said I should find ways to touch him.* "You're not going to let me live this down, are you?"

"No, I'm not." He shakes his head and then folds his arms over his chest. "You are an intriguing woman, Snow. There are layers to you that I wasn't expecting. You're shy at times, in certain situations, and speak your mind at others. You put off a demure, innocent vibe, and then let someone bend you over the hood of his car in the middle of the pouring rain."

"Guess I'm complex." I shrug. "Like an onion with all those layers."

"I'd argue that you're more of a flower with layers of petals." He sweeps a loose strand of hair over my shoulder. "You're soft and demure with an irresistible quality I can't put my finger on. I came here because your stepmother said you were interested in me, but now, I'm the one enraptured. You're fascinating, Snow. I can't quite wrap my mind around you."

How is this possible?

Someone who was voted New York's Most Eligible Bachelor and topped White Wolf Pack's Sexiest Unmated list is standing right in front of me, telling me how fascinated he is with *me*. He's everything I've ever wanted in a mate.

Happiness streaks through me, warming my chest.

I'm *this close* to having everything I've ever wanted: a mate who adores me and a happily-ever-after on the estate my late father built from the ground up.

"Snow, I don't like pulling punches, in or out of the boardroom. Bottom line is I get what I want." His voice turns dark as he presses closer, towering over me. "And what I want right now is you."

Shivers scream up my spine as I lower my gaze to the hardwood. I can't get my thoughts together, not a comprehensible word, when I'm looking up at him.

Using two fingers and a featherlight touch, he tilts my chin so that I can't look anywhere but into his eyes. "What is *your* bottom line? No bullshit."

Pinching my eyes closed, I picture Hunter. Dark hair cut close to his scalp, square jaw, full lips, blazing sapphire eyes, and a body that was built to pleasure mine. But he doesn't want to settle down. He doesn't even have plans to stay in the area. There is no future with him.

I have to push thoughts of him aside.

I have to think about more than mind-blowing sex...if that's possible.

I'm about to become Alpha of the wolf pack. With that role comes a responsibility. I'm no longer one person, able to make decisions selfishly. As of today, the pack must come first, no matter what, in every aspect of my life.

"I want someone who will make my dreams come true," I say, even though the words sound foolish to my ears. "He must understand how much this estate means to me and be willing to run it by my side." *As long as I can come up with the money to keep it out of foreclosure.* "He has to treat me like a princess during the day, and a sex slave at night." Those were Hunter's words—the ones he spoke to me yesterday—but he was right. He always seems to know what I want. "And once

that man touches me, he should never want to stop."

Hunter can't give me those things.

Not if he's planning on leaving tomorrow and never coming back.

But Malcolm—dead sexy and standing right in front of me—could give me a future beyond my wildest dreams. I can't find a single thing wrong with him—not one thing—as I study the bold curve of his cheekbones, the swooping line of his jaw, his wide nose, and almond-shaped eyes.

And he's into me.

Talk about winning the man-crush lottery.

"You and I are more compatible than you realize." He licks his lips slowly, letting his tongue linger in the corner of his mouth as his eyes shadow over. "Turn around."

"Wha—oh." Putting his hands on my hips, he spins me around so that I'm staring at my reflection once more. My raven hair spills over my shoulders, framing my heart-shaped face. My skin is white as porcelain against the yellow of my dress. "What am I supposed to be looking at?"

Slowly, brushing my shoulder blades with the pads of his fingers, Malcolm unzips the back of my dress and slides it down to the groove of my waist, and then over the swell of my hips, until it pools on the floor at my feet. Chills consume me as cool drafts of air hit my exposed skin. I'm nude and cold and completely vulnerable. Beyond my control, my body arches into his touch, into the heat of his body.

I'm drawn to him on every level. He truly is the perfect guy. As he takes me in with sweeping glances, I do the same... and I can't find one freaking thing wrong with him.

"Look how absolutely gorgeous you are," he finally says. "You're stunning."

As I stand in front of the mirror, the warmth of his breath hits my back, and my eyes flutter closed. Nerves tighten in my stomach as I wait for his hands to close over my breasts.

“I want to lay you down and explore every inch of you.” His voice is liquid sex, commanding yet soft. “But first, you’re going to do it for me.”

“What?” I start to turn toward him, but he links his hands around my wrists and guides them to my breasts.

“Don’t turn around.” His lips are on the slope of my neck, and I’m covered in chills once more. “Close your eyes.”

I do as he commands, the air hitching in my lungs as the full weight of my breasts rest in my palms. He’s holding me with my back pressed to his chest, his arms coiled beneath my arms, his fingers over mine, guiding them in a kneading motion over my nipples. The feel of him behind me, protective and strong, relaxes every muscle that had been tight moments before.

“Are your nipples hard beneath your fingers?” His voice is barely a whisper—a caress against my trembling flesh—as he grips my hands, causing me to squeeze my breasts. “Or are they soft and waiting for my tongue?”

“They’re, um...soft, I guess?”

I sound like a freaking moron, but I’ve never touched myself and told someone about it. This is phone sex stuff, and I’ve never done that, either. This is totally new territory I’m stumbling through.

“Close your eyes and imagine my mouth covering your tits, my tongue flicking out over your nipples.”

Like a strobe of lightning, Hunter’s face flashes through the darkness as I close my eyes. In my mind, it’s Hunter’s hand that grips my breasts hard as he lowers his head and sucks my nipple into his hot mouth. Sensations ripple through me, pebbling my flesh, tightening my nipples to buds.

“Yeah, you like that, don’t you?” Malcolm says, backing away. “I knew you would.”

My eyes flip open, and I’m brought back into the moment, to Malcolm’s room and his prying eyes as he parks himself on

the edge of the bed and watches my every move. He unzips his pants and jerks his massive erection free. He's long and hard, the thick tip of his shaft passing his belly button.

"Don't watch me," he says, shoving his pants off. "I want your eyes on the mirror, so you know what you look like when you experience pleasure."

Oh God.

He's really going to go through with this. He wants me to get myself off. But I've never done this in front of someone before. Reluctance tugs on something in my middle, dampening the pleasure that'd been sparking there when he was behind me, his back against mine, his mouth on my neck.

I want him to come back, for the pressure of his body to rest against mine.

"Are you wet?" he asks, as the sound of his pants hitting the floor registers in my ears. "If I was behind you, bending you over the bed, would I be able to slip my dick right inside? Or would I have to play with your clit first?"

Holy hell.

He's dirty—I wasn't expecting to hear him say such explicit things. My cheeks and ears are on fire, burning with embarrassment. But my stomach is tossing and turning, and a hollow ache is growing between my legs. Deep inside, on some level I've never known, I *like* the way he's talking to me.

"Why don't you touch yourself and find out," he purrs.

I'm frozen, stunned, about to break through the point of no return. My heart pounds in an erratic rhythm as I close my eyes and run my hands down my body to the juncture between my legs.

As my fingers slip between my folds, Hunter's face fills the darkness on the backs of my eyelids. His eyes are heavy-lidded, his tongue shooting over my clit, swirling and sucking until I'm aching and there's only one thing that'll soothe the low throbbing in my belly.

My lips part as a moan shudders through me.

“Yeah, that’s it,” I hear Malcolm say, though he sounds far away, removed from my body and this moment. “I want to sink into that tight pussy so damn bad. Do you want me inside you?”

I imagine Hunter’s fingers sinking into my heat. He strokes me from the inside out until my legs are leaden with desire, too heavy to hold up my weight.

Nodding, biting my lower lip, I widen my stance for him, gasping and trembling as he slams his palm against my mound and drives three fingers deep, stretching me to the fullest. His mouth is on mine, hot and wet, and I’m devouring him, panting, my mouth falling open as the orgasm crashes over me in a suffocating wave of heat.

“God—Snow, don’t stop,” a dark voice says, and the sound of flesh sliding against flesh hits my ears. “You’re going to make me—”

But then Malcolm’s naked body rams against mine, jerking my eyes open. His hand twists in my hair as he bends me against him, moving and tilting my mouth so he can plunge his tongue deep. As he gives a low, throaty moan, his free hand sears down my body to my ass, where he grabs and squeezes, causing me to rear against him in pain. I’m flattened against his muscular frame, prisoner to his hands and tongue and the lust spiking through me.

He’s riding the border between pain and pleasure, and I can’t stop moisture from pooling between my legs. He’s fucking hot as hell, and judging from the way he’s grinding his rod against my stomach, he’d be a sex god, too.

But every time I close my eyes, Hunter’s there.

“Turn around so I can look at that ass.”

“Malcolm...”

“Do what you are fucking told.” He spins me around, bends me over, and slides a hand down my spine. Ripples of

gooseflesh follow the path of his hand, all the way between my cheeks. Digging his fingers into the curve of my hips with one hand, he uses the other to stroke himself, faster and faster, until the sound of his dick sliding through his hand is all I can hear. "God, I can't stop—you're going to make—I'm going to come all over you—fuck."

And then he explodes, thrusting against me, moaning wildly, dropping his head back as he coats my backside with the warmth of his release.

Pleasure sparks inside me, fierce and hot, but when I glance at the reflection, my heart stops. He's sexy as hell—everything I've been waiting for—and I should be turning around and jumping his bones right about now. Kissing him. Leaping into his arms so he can carry me back to his bed and we can do this again and again and again.

"I get the feeling I'll never have enough of you." He pauses, kissing the back of my neck and my shoulders. And then, after cleaning me up with a towel from the bathroom, he says, "After you're declared Alpha at tonight's ceremony, I'll announce my plan to take you as my mate."

He didn't really give me a choice in the matter, did he?

I know what he's offering—a life I've always dreamed of. One filled with hot sex, travels in New York, a successful jewelry business, and a marriage and children at the estate. I'd rule the pack with him at my side.

Thanks to Hunter's seduction lessons, I succeeded at getting Malcolm to offer everything I've ever wanted.

But Malcolm is not the man I'd hoped to see behind me in that mirror.

Chapter Two

HUNTER

Time crawls, each second tortured with images of Snow and Malcolm and their lips locked in that forceful kiss. I caught them in the garden. I shouldn't have looked—should've turned away.

But it was like watching a train wreck. I couldn't tear my eyes away. Couldn't stop the air from punching out of my lungs.

Snow couldn't have liked it.

At least, that's what I'm telling myself.

I thought by now I would've had a better handle on the situation. Snow came to me with one purpose: to learn how to seduce Malcolm. I taught her how to become the physical lure, how to become the center of his universe, and now—where the hell does that leave me?

Alone and wanting her.

Five years ago, when I told Snow's father that I'd return this weekend, I knew I'd meet up with Snow. That was part

of my promise to him. Watch her become Alpha, and then give her his gift—something that had belonged to her mother, and her mother before her. Not sure why he couldn't trust the gift with her stepmother, but I couldn't—and would never—question my Alpha about his motives.

I knew seeing her would be difficult, after being gone for so long, but I didn't expect it to affect me this way, making me question everything. She's not the sweet, innocent girl I walked away from five years ago. No, now she's a siren, calling me closer with every sultry word whispered from her lips. She's a temptress, promising the best fucking sex of my life. She's delivered on that promise and then some.

She's not mine.

I'm spinning so hard, my mind plagued with memories of her fingers raking against my abs, my dick deep inside her, and I can't think about anything that makes a damn bit of sense.

She wants someone else.

As rage tears through me, I stop on the outskirts of my property and listen to the whooping and hollering of my buddies partying inside my cabin. They're six of my best friends in the world, but they wouldn't understand. They wouldn't know a damn thing about the war raging inside me now. They wouldn't relate, or even try to. Hell, if I told them Snow had me thinking about settling down and bonding with her—as my only mate, ever—they'd get me piss-drunk in a vain attempt to drown the insanity out of me.

Maybe I am crazy.

But she's got me questioning everything.

I want her even though I shouldn't. Even though she's probably with Malcolm now, fucking off into the sunset. She's firmly rooted in the land here, in the estate. And the only way my business thrives is if I'm out in the world, buying exotic ski lodges and fixing them up.

Screw this.

Crouching below the cabin stairs, I ball the shifting energy of the moon in my gut and focus on Snow — her angelic, heart-shaped face, narrow chin, button nose, and dark brown eyes. My body pulses with power as fur covers my skin. Every muscle in my body twitches and pulses and explodes into wolf form. Clothes fall from my body in shreds. Fangs drop from my gums as my nose lengthens, and when the shift is complete, I sit back to my haunches and cry at the moon.

Then, power surging through me, I take off, charging into the night, widening my stride and letting the strength of my lupine muscles drive me deeper into the forest. This is what this weekend was designed for, the reason the White Estate closes its doors during the full moon. In the privacy of the forest, we can be ourselves, running, hunting, mating as we please.

But I've been so consumed by Snow I haven't had a chance to stretch my legs. Maybe this is all I need to get my head on straight.

She's with Malcolm now.

This was her goal all along.

He can give her what she needs.

As her friend, I should be fucking happy for her, not wishing Malcolm a slow and painful death. Okay, I wouldn't go that far. I don't want the fucker to keel over. But if someone punched him in the nut sack until he passed out in a pool of his own vomit, I wouldn't complain.

Snow's intoxicatingly sweet scent hits my nose, but I must be delirious, because once Malcolm gets his hands on her, he's not going to let her out of his sight.

A howl erupts from the deepest part of me as I rush through the forest, weaving around trees and leaping over fallen logs. Ahead, a natural hot spring comes into view between the lush curtain of trees. Snow and I used to swim

here when we were teens, toss each other around in the water, and bitch about how stressful our lives were, as if we had any idea. Thoughts racing, I pad around the steaming mineral spring and—

“Hunter?”

Stopping mid-stride, I crane around and get an eyeful of Snow standing on the opposite side of the spring. From the adorable pinch of her eyebrows and the frown creasing her forehead, I'd say she's been standing there a while, watching me stare into the bubbling waters. Her hair is damp as if she just showered, long and draping over her shoulders, and her skin is fragrant with the unmistakable scent of her favorite rose and lavender lotion. I used to love the smell of that on her. It still tickles my nose. The red strapless dress covering her curves is silky and fine, a barely-there fabric that looks more like a sheet than a dress.

One glance and I long to howl at the moon in agony.

What are you doing here? I mindspeak as I turn to face her. *Thought you'd still be with Malcolm.*

She folds her arms over her chest and stares me down, and I realize I don't care what happened between her and What's-His-Fuck. I don't need to know any more than I already do.

With one hard mental push, I shift back. Fur gives way to skin, and my body returns to its human form. I'm keenly aware of Snow's eyes on me as I rise from the ground and approach her, muscles flexing and twitching, my naked body glistening with sweat.

“Don't answer that.” I can feel my gaze burning into her as I run my hand along her cheek. “It doesn't matter. You're here now, and that's enough for me. *You* are more than enough.”

“Hunter.”

“The one and only.” I curl my fingers around her wrist and draw it to my mouth. I plant a kiss on the palm of her hand, never tearing my eyes from hers. “You're not tied to me,

Snow." Something snags in my chest as I drown in the depths of her eyes. "If you want to be with Malcolm, if you believe he's the guy who'll make you happy, then you should be with him. End of story. You don't owe me a single explanation."

"I have to tell you something." She swallows hard as her gaze drops to my bare abs and lower, to my straining erection, which is bobbing in the space between us. "But I can't think when you're pointing at me."

Just like that, any tension that had been between us before is gone. She laughs, so I kiss her quiet, taking her mouth and slipping my tongue past her lips. I tunnel my fingers through her hair and cup the back of her neck to draw her closer, tilt her head, and slant her mouth against mine. Whimpering deep in her throat, she kisses me back, coiling her arms around my neck as her tongue strokes the inside of my cheek.

As she rubs against my erection, I devour more of her mouth and relish the currents of heat radiating from her body to mine. She's burning. Aching. The need in her kiss is desperate and primal, and I'm so ready to give her everything. All I have.

Lifting her off her feet, I press her against me until we're so close that she's panting into my mouth and I'm breathing her in, letting her air fill every aching part of me.

Step by slow step, I move toward the spring and lower us into the pool. Water bubbles around us, lifting her dress so that it flares around her in a silken spill of red. She's soft and wet and molding into my arms as I take a ragged breath and pin her against the edge of the spring. Planting my hands against the rocks on either side of her shoulders, I trap her with the cage of my body.

And now I'm never letting her go.

"Hunter..." As if she's read my thoughts, a smirk plays at the corner of her succulent mouth. "I'm not going anywhere."

I groan in approval, peeling the silky gown from her body

and tossing it onto the bank next to us. Lowering my head to her breasts, I lick and suck and gently grate my teeth against her nipples until she's shivering from pleasure, her hips rising out of the water. Flattening my hand against her stomach, I press her down as her chest arches higher, reaching for more.

"Your body feels so damn good sliding against me." As I assault her nipples with flicks of my tongue, I reach down, brush my fingers over her clit, and slip a finger inside her. "So fucking tight."

Gasping, she lifts up, her smooth legs spreading wide as I pound into her heat and curl my fingers inside her. "Hunter," she says, her voice thick with pleasure. "Please, I need —"

"Wrap your legs around me."

Sliding my hands beneath her undulating hips, I clutch her thighs, tug her against me, and sheath myself inside her in one viciously slow stroke. On contact, a growling sound rises in my chest, and as I move her hips up and down over my straining shaft, the slick swell of her breasts smashes against my chest, sending chills scattering to the base of my spine.

She moans, throwing her head back, rocking her hips over me as her hands slide over my bulging chest muscles and down the grooves of my abs. Bursting to drive deeper—so fucking deep inside her—I spread her legs wider, gripping her thighs, squeezing hard.

"You're unbelievable," she says, her words darkened by hunger. "Amazing. How am I ever going to be able to..."

But her words die off on a gasp as she rests her shoulders against the wall and lifts her hips up, shivering with the force of my dick as it stretches the walls of her sex. Her inner muscles milk my cock, and as I flex my hips against her, she stills.

"I can feel every pulse of your tight little pussy," I force out between clenched teeth. My whole body trembles wildly with need. "Feels so fucking good."

I draw back, sliding my cock out before ramming it into

her heat again. We groan in unison, our hips pounding against one another beneath the water until waves are sloshing against her breasts, wetting her nipples, stoking the blazing fire that's roaring inside me.

Thought evaporates like steam as each deep thrust drives me closer to a violent peak. There is nothing but this moment, the warmth of her pussy as it clutches my cock, the heavy-lidded look of desire in her coal-black eyes, and her luscious lips as they part, whimpering my name over and over again.

I can't look away, so I brand this moment on my mind to remember on nights when she's in another's arms.

But not tonight.

Not now.

Releasing my grip on her backside, I caress her clit with my thumb, around and around, swirling over her pleasure spot, drawing out gasps and moans and primal sounds that echo through the night.

She arches up, stiffening, crying out, her most sensitive flesh squeezing my dick as the orgasm roars through her. I fuck her harder, deeper, until she's screaming and writhing against me, clawing at my sides for release.

"I'm not finished with you yet." My voice has gone hoarse as I ram into her again and again. "I want to see those big tits bouncing in my face."

Grinning coyly, she slides out from underneath me and waits for me to sit on the edge of stone before swimming over my lap, one bent leg on either side. I grip her ass tight, lift her up, and then lower her over my cock with a hiss. She's so wet, so tight, a perfect glove.

"Fuck, Snow." I groan.

Her eyes roll back as I move inside her, the tempo rising faster and faster. And as she leans over the top of me, bouncing as I thrust deep, I bury my face between her breasts and lose myself.

She's soft and so fucking hot, and my heart is pounding like a drum in my chest. As the crescendo rises, I can't breathe. Can't move. I still beneath her, but she takes over, rolling her hips, rising up and crashing down over me. Her nipples are in my mouth, the perfect peaks wet and sweet. I'm buried so blissfully deep inside, my climax closing in.

"Look at me," I say, raking my hands up her back to cup her neck. I tilt her head so she's staring at me, through me, with those dark, piercing eyes. "Snow...you're mine."

Her lips part on a breathy moan. "Yours."

The climax hits with the force of a battering ram, rocking, slamming, shattering me completely as I empty myself into her. I sweep my fingers through her folds one more time, and her cry joins mine as a second orgasm rolls through her body.

"Don't move." I clutch her against me tightly, her chest against mine, her chin resting on my shoulder. I don't want her to leave, not ever. I realize that now, as I'm buried deep inside. "Just stay here."

Now. Forever.

"I don't know how you do this to me," she murmurs, planting a kiss on my neck. "You really are a master."

"Only for you."

From this day forward.

This isn't supposed to happen. I'm not supposed to be thinking about making her mine for more than a night. I shouldn't be contemplating whether she would move to the lodge with me, or if she'd want us to live at the estate. It'd probably be the estate—she loves it there. And that'd be fine with me.

There I go again, picturing a future together when I should be thinking about my next move, and the developers awaiting my arrival in Iceland on Tuesday. I need to be there to close this deal. I fly out first thing tomorrow morning and can't turn back now. I'm charging full steam ahead.

I wasn't supposed to find my mate in Snow. She's my friend—the very best—but now, coupled with the soul-shattering sex we've had this weekend, I'm thinking...*things*.

Mind-fuck type things of the forever variety.

Most surprising of all? I'm not freaked. Not anymore. Not when I'm picturing a future with her tucked safely in my arms.

Just now, in the heat of the spring, something shifted deep inside me.

I want her, damn it. I can take care of her better than Fuck-Off can. I know her desires and fantasies without her having to tell me. I understand her loves and fears and hesitations. I see her for who she really is. And she's the most beautiful woman, inside and out, I've met in my whole life.

I simply didn't think she was *my* woman.

Until now.

"Snow," I say, my dick twitching inside her. "The final rule of seduction is all about pleasure." I can barely breathe as my heart races, slamming against my ribs. "It's about getting down to who you really are and what you truly want."

She rakes her fingers over my scalp and turns my head to stamp a soft kiss on my lips. "What I truly want?" she parrots as if she's thinking aloud.

"If you understand who you are, what you stand for, and what you want in a partner, you will exude confidence." I brush my fingers along her narrow jawline and pause on a tiny freckle I've never noticed before. "That poise will draw people in. So you have to search deep." Out of my control, my hips rise and my dick swells, eager for round two. "And when you determine what you want, you shouldn't waver in your search to find the right person to give it to you."

And if she'll let me, I'll give it to her every single day for the rest of our lives.

Gripping my shoulders for balance, she rolls her hips over mine in a slow rhythm, kissing my shoulder, neck, and nipping

at my ear. "What if I already know what I want?"

"You take it."

For the next seconds, minutes, hours—who can be sure?—the space between us is filled with nothing but the sound of desperate panting, moans of pleasure, and water sloshing between our bodies as we pound against one another.

When we're completely spent and unable to move, I cradle her in my arms, resting her head against my chest, and replay mental images of our sexcapade in the spring.

I'd almost forgotten she wanted to tell me something earlier, when she first approached me.

"What was that thing you wanted to tell me?" I ask.

She swallows hard against me but doesn't look up into my eyes. "Are you planning on going to the ceremony tonight?"

Her voice is tight, as if she's suddenly nervous about something.

"I wouldn't miss it."

I can't. Because immediately after, I'm fulfilling my duty to her father. I'd offer the gift to her now, but I've already waited this long, and I swore to her father I'd do it at the right time, after she was sworn in.

"Are you sure you want to go?" she asks, sliding up to sit. And her voice goes dark again. "You could stay. There's really no reason for you to be there."

"Are you kidding?" I pick up her hand and kiss the wrinkly pads of her fingers. "This is the day you've been waiting for your whole life. Why wouldn't I go?" As I wait for her to respond, searching her face for something, anything, a strange feeling creeps up my spine. "Do you not want me there?"

"It's not that, but—"

"But?" Gripping her hips, I bring her closer. I don't like the distance she's suddenly put between us. "What, Snow?"

She kisses me, slow and open-mouthed, and when she

pulls back, fear darkens her eyes. "Malcolm says he wants to declare me as his mate tonight."

I didn't hear right. Couldn't have.

Shaking my head, I replay her words. But I don't let the anger flare in me. Not yet.

"What did you tell him?" I ask, keeping my jealousy on a tight leash.

God, what I wouldn't give to hear Snow say she told Malcolm to go fuck himself. But she wouldn't do that. It's not in her to be that cold and calloused. And that soft side is one of the things I love about her.

Fuck.

I love her.

I do. The emotion is so foreign I didn't recognize it until now. But I'm absolutely drop-dead, howl-at-the-moon crazy in love with my best friend.

"I didn't respond at all, because I didn't know what to say," she blurts before I can tell her about the late-breaking news. "He surprised me with it. I had no idea he wanted me that badly. I can see why you've had women drooling over you for years." She chuckles, though it's insincere and bumbling with nerves. "I guess your lessons work better than I thought."

Wrong. Answer.

She's happy about the fact that Malcolm is begging to get into her pants.

The warmth that had been spreading through my chest moments before flips to bitterness. An awful, vile feeling sinks to a pit in my stomach. "You really nailed him, Snow. You're the seductress of the year. Congratulations."

As I emerge from the hot spring, steaming wet and buck naked, I realize I don't have my clothes. I shredded them when I shifted by the lodge earlier.

"No, Hunter, please don't go," she says, climbing out of the water behind me. "I'm going to return to the estate, but

only for a couple of hours, and then I'd really like to talk to you about something. Will you wait up for me?"

Oh, sure as fuck.

I'll be waiting with my dick in my hand for her to bond with Malcolm and then return to tell all the sordid details. I'll be her booty call. The guy she runs to when she wants a good lay. The friend she tells everything to, while Malcolm gets to claim her every day and every night.

A year ago—hell, last week—that would've been enough for me.

Now? I want her to be *mine*, every minute of every day, and not just for the sex. I want *her*.

But she wasn't sure enough about me—about us—to know what to say to Malcolm when he declared his intent.

"Yeah." I focus on the coming shift, balling all the hatred and jealousy and bitterness in the bottom of my stomach. "Sure thing. Can you make it back to the estate all right on your own?"

"Yeah, but, Hunter—"

"Come back whenever you want."

And then I let the rage explode through me as I shift into wolf form and take off toward the lodge.

Chapter Three

SNOW

Know who I really am and what I really want.

I've been thinking about Hunter's final rule of seduction since I stepped foot in the estate an hour ago. I tried to find Malcolm or my stepmother to discuss my plans first thing, but they're MIA.

I have to find them.

Sooner rather than later is best, but Hunter said he would wait for me. If it takes all night, my stepmother will have to understand where I'm coming from. And Malcolm will know that I don't plan on being Mrs. Taylor. As amazing as that sounds on the surface, it's not what I truly want. However, a business relationship could be a different matter entirely.

If he's still interested.

Before emerging from my room to head down to the ceremony, I let the wolf part of me burst to the surface. In the blink of an eye, fur coats my skin in a smooth layer of white. My muzzle elongates, my fangs drop, and as I sink to

my haunches, a shake rolls through me, from my tail to my ears and back again.

God, that feels good.

It's been too long since I've shifted. I've been so preoccupied with Hunter and Malcolm that I haven't taken advantage of this weekend away from the prying eyes of our usual estate visitors to shift. I've missed the freedom, the heightened senses, and the raw strength pulsing through my muscles. I haven't even really been that nervous about becoming Alpha. Normally, I would've been anxious as hell, but Hunter managed to distract me in the best way possible.

Padding down the halls, passing packmates as I go, I practice what I'm going to say to my stepmother.

It's not going to work with Malcolm, not the way you want. I'm going to talk to him about investing in our estate. If he wants in, we're golden. If not, we'll move and land on our feet. We'll be fine.

Simple. Clear cut. She's still going to be pissed that her plan didn't work out.

But this last weekend has clarified a few things. I know who I am, who my parents raised me to be. I'm proud to carry the White last name, and I have worked my behind off to keep my father's legacy burning brightly through the estate. Even though it's failing—I'm failing—I can confidently say I've done everything in my power to save it.

I wasn't expecting one of the richest men in the country to want a future with me. A relationship with Malcolm would save the thing I've loved most in the world, and although it's tempting as hell to jump on board that ship and sail off into the sunset, it's not the path I want.

That's the other thing that's become clear.

I want Hunter and everything that means. All I can think about is the heat in his touch, the loving gleam in his sapphire-blue eyes, the hint of a smirk curling his kissable lips, and the

way he fills me with passion and love when he plunges deep inside me.

That's what I really want.

As far as where we'll live, and where the packmates will shift, we'll choose one of Hunter's lodges—the one in Colorado or Alaska, maybe—and we'll have full moon festivities there. We'll use that lodge as our home base for one week out of the month when the pack needs me the most and then travel the other three weeks.

It won't be an ideal situation when we finally decide to have children, but we can cross that bridge when we get there. Maybe he'll decide to put down roots himself, the way my father did when he met my mother.

I can still have everything. It's right at the tips of my fingers.

At the bottom of the stairs, I turn right and stare out over the wide expanse of the back lawn. The breath stalls in my lungs, the way it always does at induction ceremony time. Black, white, and brown wolves dot the lawn, bowing, crouching, or lying in the grass. They're divided into unmated and mated sections, with the latter lining the edges. In the middle of the furry group, unmated wolves line up, ready to declare their mate in front of everyone.

Unlike other packs in the area, our rules don't require that a werewolf bond with another on induction night in order to be included in the pack. Wolves can belong to our family, receive all the support and protection we offer, without being mated to another. My father, a hopeless romantic to the end, felt werewolves should wait for their fated mates rather than choose one hastily. My stepmother, on the other hand, doesn't believe in fated mates. She routinely asks packmates to marry for financial security alone, to strengthen our core.

Some listen, some don't.

I don't need to hear her speeches at the monthly induction

ceremony to know how strongly she feels about the issue. She wouldn't be pushing Malcolm on me if diamonds weren't dripping out of his pockets.

There you are, my stepmother says from beside me, projecting the thought from her mind to mine. *I was wondering where you'd disappeared to.*

She's regal as a wolf, with inky black fur, lean, sinewy muscles, and her chin slightly lifted so she can glare down the ridge of her narrow muzzle. I'm as opposite as I can get, with snowy white fur, wide brown eyes, and a thick, bushy tail—more like my father than I realized before he died.

I had a few things to take care of, I project back, striding out the French doors and onto the back patio. *But I'm here now.*

She follows me out the doors and into the late afternoon sun, her penetrating gaze heating my back with its intensity. *I had an interesting talk with Malcolm in my office earlier today.*

That's why I couldn't find them. She'd arranged a private meeting.

Did he tell her about our time in his room? About how he got off on watching me in the mirror? *Please* let him have kept his mouth shut. It'll only make things more complicated to explain. Anxiety whips through me, stinging my chest and burning a hole in the back of my throat.

Oh yeah? I force my tone flat as I measure her impenetrable gaze. *What'd he have to say?*

She perches on the edge of the patio as wolves fill the empty spaces before us. *He said he intends to declare you as his mate at today's ceremony. I have to say, Snow, I was unsure whether you'd be able to pull this off. But you did it. I underestimated your ability to seduce a man, but thank the Lord above I didn't underestimate your beauty.*

Maybe I piqued his interest with my brains, I answer, eyeing the lawn as it fills with my pack brothers and sisters.

Ever thought of that?

Oh sure. Unmated males like Malcolm are focused on brains. Gotcha. She bumps against me playfully. *The how and the why don't interest me at all, actually. I'm simply glad you came to your senses. Bonding with Malcolm is the only way we can secure our future.*

I shouldn't respond, shouldn't answer, not until I speak with Malcolm. But as my gaze skids over the packmates in attendance, I spy six of Hunter's friends gathered in the center of the lawn. Cash, Diesel, Harley, J.D., Rocky, and Goliath. They're massive in wolf form, with thick muzzles, wide paws, and coarse gray and black fur.

If my stepmother knew I'd spent the last few nights in their company, she'd be pissed. And when she finds out I plan to refuse Malcolm and marry Hunter—God, she's going to blow her lid.

Keep it clear and simple. What had I wanted to say?

The words don't come.

I don't think you should put too much hope on my relationship with Malcolm, I say, taking a leap. *Things may not work out the way you've planned.*

She pulls back slowly. *How so?*

Sighing heavily, I turn toward her, staring into the depths of her dark eyes. *I'm not going to bond with Malcolm tonight. I just need to talk to him before the ceremony.*

But he said—I could've sworn he said the two of you were on the same page. Her tone is vile, tightened with hatred. *I didn't mishear him.*

I clench my teeth together and sit back, relishing the breeze as it sweeps over the lawn and ruffles my fur. The conversation is tense and heating me through, and it's only going to get worse.

I've changed my mind.

Her attention darts to the wolves gathering on the lawn,

and then back to me. *Come with me. We'll finish talking about this in private.*

It's not going to change anything.

A low growl erupts from her chest. *We'll see.*

Exiting the patio with a grimace etched on her stoic face, my stepmother slips inside the main hall, past the bustling dining room, up the stairs, and into the den. As I enter behind her, she shifts back into human form and drags a robe off a hook behind the door. Tying the silk sash around her waist, she glares over her shoulder as she heads toward the bar.

"For the talk we're about to have, I'll need a drink," she bites out, hatred in her tone. "Close the door, would you?"

Shifting back to human form to match her, I close the door and drag a blue velvet robe off its hook. Shoving my arms into the sleeves, I watch my stepmother carefully as she opens a drawer beside the mahogany bar, digs out a wrought iron skeleton key, and crouches, leaving my line of sight.

"And I get the feeling I'll need something special, something stronger," I hear her say as the sound of a key twisting in a lock hits my ears. "It's a shame we have to keep the expensive liquor locked up. Can't even trust the staff these days."

I keep my mouth shut as I pace around the den, taking in the teeming shelves of leather-bound classics. This was always my father's favorite room—I'd find him in here all the time, relaxing in front of the stone hearth, his foot kicked up over his knee, a cigar on his lips and a book open in his hands. It smells of well-oiled wood and old book pages, and I can't help but breathe deeply in the comforting space.

"Now," my stepmother says suddenly, cutting my relaxing breath short, "what the hell is wrong with you, Snow?"

All feelings of comfort are gone. Obliterated. I'm left with nothing but a skin full of chills and a stuttering in my heart.

"Nothing is wrong with me," I answer, listening to ice

shake in the martini tumbler as she waves it in the air. “But I’ve come to the realization that Malcolm isn’t the man who can make me happy.”

“You think ruling this pack is about making *yourself* happy and catering to *your* needs?” She laughs sickly. “I was right to doubt your ability—and your intention. You’re not ready to become Alpha.”

Doubt trickles into my heart. I *feel* ready, but maybe she’s right. Maybe I’m too selfish, and too stubborn, to make decisions based solely on the pack’s needs.

If only I could talk to Malcolm...

“This is what I don’t get, Snow,” my stepmother goes on, pouring bright green liquid evenly into two martini glasses. “Malcolm is handsome, charming, and probably has more money than the goddamn royal family. It’s not like I’m asking you to marry a hunchback for the sake of the pack. Hell, without taking a poll, I know most of the women here would chew off their hind legs for a chance with a guy like Malcolm. You’re the only one who seems to have a problem with the arrangement.”

“You’re right. About everything. Malcolm’s as perfect as I thought he was.” Swallowing hard, I say the thing I’ve been meaning to say since I walked back to the estate earlier. “He’s everything I’ve ever wanted in a mate, but I have to follow my heart like my father would’ve wanted me to do. I can try to deny it—and I have—but my heart is leading me back through that forest, right into Hunter’s arms. It always has, I simply didn’t realize how much until I finally got what I wanted...Malcolm. And then realized he wasn’t the one I wanted after all.”

It’s done. Over.

I couldn’t have said it better if I’d outlined it on index cards.

My stepmother glares as she focuses on the glasses in her

hands. “Your packmates rely on this place—the home your father built with his two hands—to shift in private and be themselves. Some of our packmates have been visiting the White Estate since their first transition, over fifty years ago. Others are new, joined our family later, but have become lifelong friends.”

My thoughts turn to Hunter’s buddies. They accepted me as part of their tight inner circle. Cash let me beat him at poker, J.D. shared his favorite drink with me, and Diesel let Hunter and I borrow his car to get down and dirty. He may not know that’s what happened, but I’m sure he wouldn’t care. Hell, he’d probably high-five Hunter just as fast as he’d scold him for it. They’re more like brothers than friends. Family through and through.

“Without this place,” my stepmother goes on, striding over and extending a glass toward me, “where will we meet during the full moon? If we lose our home, as we’re going to do, we won’t have the credit to secure another estate as massive as this—one that can accommodate everyone comfortably.”

It’s happened before, to other packs. They split apart, go different ways, join other packs or remain rogue.

But I have a plan...

I take the drink from her—an appletini, my favorite—and take the first sip. It’s chilled and sweet and instantly soothes the nerves rattling through me. “There might be a way to solve everything.” As I take another drink, something bitter strikes my palate. I swipe my thumb over the sugar-dusted rim, eyeing the residue left on my fingers. “I just need to talk to Malcolm before he declares me as his mate in front of everyone.”

“I can’t believe you’re going to screw this whole thing up. He’s perfect and you know it, and for reasons I can’t fathom, he wants to spend the rest of his life with you.” Venom drips from her tone as she shakes her head disapprovingly. “If you

would stop acting like a selfish troll and put the pack's needs before your own for once, you'd finally be the Alpha they need."

"If you would trust me for once"—I clear my throat as bitterness clings there—"you'd realize I'm not going to let my packmates down. I just need..." My vision swims in and out, in and out. Warm, soothing feelings wash through me, weakening my arms and legs. "What kind of vodka did you use?" Every muscle in my body loosens, going completely relaxed, until I feel like I'm floating. Squinting, I stare at the drink in my hand. "It's...strong."

My stepmother sets her drink on the end of the bar and approaches me, though she's a blur, the outline of her body fuzzy and undistinguishable. "Well, let's see. There's vodka, apple schnapps, Cointreau, and...what was that last ingredient? *Oh yes*—ketamine."

Her final word strikes me hard, echoing through my head with the force of a sledgehammer. Temples throbbing, I stagger, reaching for the mantel, the couch, something, anything, as the glass slips from my hand and shatters on the hardwood floor.

"Sweet dreams, Snow White."

Spots dance in front of my eyes as I lose my balance and stagger into something hard. Was that the hearth? I'm passing out, going down, being sucked into blackness.

No, no, no. But I'm too tired—too drugged—to fight the dark closing in.

My stepmother's slow, wicked laugh engulfs me as I hit the floor.

Chapter Four

SNOW

I feel as if I'm crawling out of quicksand...only, I'm in my mind. My thoughts are murky and slow moving. My arms are like lead, dreadfully heavy, and I couldn't move them if I tried. I can't open my eyes, but not because they're taped shut. At least I can't feel any tape.

I can't feel anything.

My senses are blocked. Dead. I can't hear anything, not even my own heartbeat. I can't feel anything, either. Nothing. Blackness consumes me like a cloak, covering every inch of me inside and out. There's no panic, no startle, no adrenaline. I'm comfortable. Numb. Blissfully aware of being unaware.

From out of nowhere, the sensation of lying down strikes me.

Until that pinprick of a realization, I could've been standing, sitting, floating through the starless expanse of night over my head.

I'm lying down.

I know that now, and I hold onto that thought as if it's the most important thing I've ever known. Is my head on a pillow? The floor? I can't tell, but I don't care.

"You said there were diamonds." Gravelly tones ooze into my ears, the first sound I've heard in—God, how long as it been? Time doesn't exist. Doesn't matter. Not anymore. "We've searched every inch of the estate and the forest. They are no mines here."

I try to turn my head toward the person speaking, but I can't force my body to do anything. It's as if it doesn't belong to me.

"My husband, her father..." Another voice. Scratchy. Scraping against my ears. "He said there were diamonds...he wouldn't have lied."

Words blend together into waves of sound that I can't make out and don't want to. They're interrupting the heavenly blackness that's become my serenity in a world of chaos. Colors warp in front of my eyes, circles of blue and yellow, red and radiant green. A kaleidoscope of sensation whirls through the void in my head, mixing with vibrant shades of the rainbow, and I'm swept away in relaxation again.

More sounds. Words become clear.

"You will bond with her, and the diamond mines will be yours...you'll announce it now. They're expecting you. They've already been waiting too long."

Silence stretches through the room, and I'm grateful for the return of the stillness.

"What should I do about Snow?" the dark voice whispers. "I won't force her to bond with me while she's in this state. I want her to be mine, but not like...*this*. She can't even open her eyes. Does the doctor know why she won't wake up?"

My brain turns over like an engine, slow and groggy, replaying sounds and syllables over and over again until they begin to make sense. And then I'm reaching for the tones I

recognize, forming them into words and sentences.

"No. He said it's very strange, but he was only here a few moments before he got another call. We were talking about your impending announcement, and she just blacked out. Hit the floor hard, the poor thing. The excitement must've been too much for her heart to bear. The doctor says not to worry, that she'll wake up soon and be better than ever."

More silence, and now my chest feels weird, as if something inside it has stopped moving. I'm frozen inside my own body, unable to move, even if my thoughts are whirling at full speed, grasping every word being spoken around me.

"Don't let this stop you. Declare her as your mate, Malcolm."

Malcolm.

A spark of recognition flares inside me, and his face fills the blackness behind my eyelids. He's come to check on me. To help, maybe.

Help! I cry out, my lips unmoving. *What's happened to me?*

"Tell the pack that she's fallen ill," the female drones on, "and you will complete the bonding process when she wakes." This voice is strangely familiar, raising the hairs on the back of my neck, but I can't muster the will to figure out who it belongs to. "You two want to be together, so I don't see any reason why you should postpone this further. You'll find the mines eventually, grow your business and ours, and everyone will get the future they've dreamed of. Everything will work out. I make that my vow to you."

"In your correspondence, you promised me the most beautiful woman I've ever seen, and you delivered." A never-ending pause stretches to infinity and back again. "But you also promised me lavish, unspoiled diamond mines. In my business, when people give their word, they mean it or they pay the consequences."

Diamonds? That's why Malcolm came to our estate? To get the mines on our land? My father mentioned diamond mines from time to time. He thought the entrance might've been somewhere in the forest to the west, but he'd never found it. At least, not that I'd ever heard.

"Is that a threat?" the female asks.

I wait for a response, a whisper of a word, but nothing comes. Suddenly, from out of the void, something clicks in the distance. A clock? No, maybe a door lock. And then I'm swallowed in silence once more.

Using every ounce of strength in my sapped muscles—which isn't much—I strain, urging my eyelids apart. But they don't move. I'm my own prisoner, trapped in my body where it's warm and soothing. There's no up or down, past or future. Static fills the blackness on the backs of my eyelids. Black and white dots shift and tweak, fuzzing in front of my eyes.

"Oh, my dear." That sweet, fake voice fills my ears. It's so close. Right beside me. "Your future mate may be charming, but he's a complete imbecile. *Does the doctor know why she won't wake up?*" she mimics, giving Malcolm her worst doltish voice. "Why would I call the doctor to check on you? He might suspect the drug I put in your drink."

Stepmother.

As her words *kerplunk* into place in my brain, chills scamper over my skin, freezing the air in my lungs. I open my mouth to scream, but nothing comes out. I force my arms to move, my legs, my fingers—*anything*.

It's useless. Hopeless.

She drugged me.

And then her face is pressed against mine, cheek to cheek, as she exhales heavily. "In a few minutes, Malcolm will declare you as his mate. He's made his choice to be with you for the rest of his life, and that decision will secure our future. I thought you'd be happy with that, but you wanted more, you

selfish little brat.”

Something smacks me against the cheek. *The back of her hand*, I realize, as a bitter sting radiates through my face.

“Now you have a choice, too,” she seethes. I can sense her hatred as she twists her fingers through my hair and gives it a solid yank. “You can either forget about your flirting in the forest with Hunter and complete the bonding process with Malcolm when he returns...or you can remain in this state indefinitely. Believe me, I have the stuff to keep you knocked out for the rest of your life. The doctors won’t be able to explain what’s happened, and as your guardian, I’ll insist that no blood work be done.”

Indefinitely?

Fear washes over me. I try to move, to fight, to break free from whatever hold the drugs have over me, but I can’t. They’re too strong. It’s as if my body has detached from my brain and decided to stop listening.

“If you choose to cooperate and take Malcolm as your husband, the drugs will wear off in a few hours, you’ll wake up, and you’ll be happy. We’ll *all* be happy,” my stepmother continues, her voice going tight. “But if you don’t cooperate, you’ll stay in this state. Once Malcolm announces that you are his mate in front of the pack, he can’t back out unless you free him from that declaration. If you’re stuck in a drug-induced coma, you won’t be saying much of anything. He’ll be forced to move to the estate and care for us like his own family, and our financial worries will end. You won’t even need to finish the bonding process with him. You see, my dear Snow, I win either way.”

She’s sick. Delusional. I’d tell her that if my tongue were working properly.

“I know you can hear me,” she goes on, her voice twisting my stomach into knots, “and I know you’re trying to figure a way out of this, but there isn’t one. Now, I’m going to go

downstairs and listen to Malcolm's declaration, and when I return in a few hours, you'll make your choice."

She smacks me on the cheek once, twice, and then stands. I can hear her dress swish over the hardwood as she moves toward the door, and when it closes behind her, the *clink-clink-clink* of chains rattling against one another hits my ears.

She's locking me in.

Even if the drugs wear off before she gets back, I'm not going anywhere.

I pinch my eyes closed, whisper a silent plea to Hunter, and as the dizzying effects of the drug overtake me again, I succumb to the dark.

Chapter Five

HUNTER

I should stay away. Let Snow make her decision for herself. If she wants to be with Malcolm, I should let her. I've never been one to chase a woman. Especially one who seems hell-bent on leaving to be with another dude.

But *damn*, she's got me twisted.

I lived without her just fine for the last five years. But now, after this weekend, I see her in a different light. Now, fuck five years. I'm not going to be able to live another five *minutes* without her by my side.

The guys have already high-tailed it out of the lodge. They're probably at the White Estate by now with the rest of our pack, ready to watch the ceremony. I've been dragging my feet, contemplating whether I should skip the ceremony all together and simply give her the gift from her father afterward. But those damn seconds tick, tick, tick away, eating at my insides until they're raw.

I can't stay away.

Before I realize what the hell's going on, my feet lead me to the edge of the forest next to the estate. The harsh afternoon sun looms overhead, illuminating the peppering of wolves over the lawn, and the wide back porch where Snow and her stepmother should be standing, overseeing the induction. I can't see them from back here, but I know the routine—it can't have changed that much since I've been gone. A wave of heat washes over me, causing my shirt to stick to my back and beads of sweat to trickle down my temple.

I search for Snow on the back porch and in the sea of wolves in front of me.

She's not here.

Movement catches my eye near the main house. Someone is shrinking into the shadows, pacing the porch.

Malcolm.

I slink closer, my heightened sense of smell picking up his pungent scent: earthy tones mixed with something feral and dark. His long strands of golden fur flatten in the wind as he edges toward the center of the porch and postures in front of everyone. Malcolm is burlier than I thought he'd be, but he's still no match for me, and I'm itching for him to throw down a challenge.

Where's Snow?

She should be here...

Creeping toward the rear of the pack as their attention is honed in on Malcolm, I shift into wolf form in stride. Clothes are ripped to shreds as strength pulses through my muscles. Letting the shifting energy snap through me, I drop to all fours and pad over the lawn, my claws digging into the soil. My senses intensify—if that's possible—and everything becomes clear as crystal. The chirping of birds in the trees behind me. The scent of each of the packmates in front of me. The hard pounding of my heart as it calls to Snow's.

Packmates, Malcolm says, facing his wolf brothers and

sisters, projecting his thoughts loud and clear. *Mrs. White will be out here in a moment, but first, I must thank her and Snow for their hospitality this weekend. It's been an enlightening few days, at least on my part. As you all know, I haven't been to the full moon festivities in years. I let business rule my life for so long, I forgot what it was like to have family around me. This weekend, you've reminded me of that, and I thank you.*

As the pack goes wild, I slink closer, hovering along the far right edge of the lawn. Behind Malcolm, Mrs. White emerges from the main house, a lean, inky-black haired wolf with piercing blue eyes. She stands beside him, as if to signify a united front, and I'm still searching for Snow.

While we're on the topic of family, Malcolm projects loudly, his gaze sweeping over the lawn from one side to the other, I have a special announcement to make.

If he says he's bonding with Snow, if she's agreed to this, I'm going to explode. The pressure on my heart is already too much to bear.

Where is she?

Malcolm paces from one side of the patio to the other. *When I arrived Friday evening, I had a private meeting with Mrs. White. She informed me that the estate had fallen into serious debt.*

Whispers spread through the thoughts of the pack.

Many of you may not have realized the strain the Whites have been under these last few months as they've scrambled to find a solution to their financial difficulties, but I can assure you everything is fine now. Or, rather, it will be very soon. Malcolm lifts his muzzle to the crowd, the magnanimous bastard. *I have paid off all their debts, free and clear. The estate has been saved.*

What. The. Ever-fucking. Fuck.

The wolves covering the lawn howl in excitement, padding closer to the patio, giving me a glimpse of Cash and Harley in the center. They're watching the commotion skeptically, the

arch of their backs curved high as if their bullshit meters are rocketing off the charts, too.

I search for Snow, seeking her out every way I can. I don't sense her here or anywhere in the vicinity.

If that announcement isn't exciting enough, Malcolm boasts proudly, I have another.

Snow's stepmother sits back on her haunches beside Malcolm as if she knows exactly what he's about to say. And if the skin crawling beneath my fur is any indication, I know, too.

As Malcolm's voice drones through my head, I reach Cash and Harley's side. J.D., Rocky, Goliath, and Diesel turn as I approach, nodding and lowering their muzzles before turning their attention back to the shit-show.

Packmates, Malcolm says, projecting so hard, he's practically yelling in my head, I declare Snow White as my mate. From this day forward, our lives are entwined, two as one, forever together, never to part.

Fuck.

I can't help but project the word and catch the unwanted attention of every wolf gathered around me. My heart stops momentarily before jolting back to its rhythm, flip-flopping in my chest. Everyone eventually turns back to the stage. Well, everyone except for the guys, who can sense the fury building inside me. I'm going to snap, I know it.

If Snow were here, if I could see the look on her face and know she was happy with this decision, that *this* was what she truly wanted for her future—a fuckwit who could offer her financial security and little else—I could walk away. I'd never get over her, but I could live well knowing *she* was happy.

But Snow's noticeably absent, which isn't like her. She wouldn't miss this ceremony for the world. Nothing would keep her from this moment when she should be taking her rightful position in front of the pack.

Unfortunately, Snow has fallen ill and can't be present to complete our declaration, Malcolm continues as if he's read my mind. *But we will conclude the bonding process once she is well.*

His words rub me raw, scraping against my skull as I struggle to process them.

Something's wrong.

I can't pinpoint it exactly, but as I search the patio, my gaze hones in on Mrs. White. She's shifting her weight back and forth, her tail curving slightly between her legs. And she's giving off an anxious vibe that's softly permeating the happiness of those around her. If everyone weren't so flipping excited about the latest news, they might detect it, too.

As Malcolm steps back into the shadows and Mrs. White moves forward, I can't take my eyes off her. She's hiding something. I feel it in my bones, even as she talks about numbers and figures and future plans.

I know you'd all hoped to see Snow declared as Alpha this afternoon, she projects, but under the circumstances, that can't happen today. We're going to postpone the official declaration until further notice.

I need to find Snow. I push my thoughts to the guys. *We're going to spread out and search the estate, and we'll meet up—*

I cut my thoughts short as they turn my way slowly, measuring me beneath bushy brows.

Dude... Goliath's voice scratches like a razor blade inside my head. You know I'm all for going balls-out to land a dame, but what's the point? She picked someone else. He declared her as his mate. It's over.

The hell it is. Blood lurches through my veins as the thoughts escape me, coupled with an audible growl. *I was with Snow all weekend. I don't care what that dipshit says, she isn't sick. Even if she were, she wouldn't miss this ceremony. Nothing would stop her from being here.*

Doesn't change the facts, my man.

Grumbling softly, Cash paws at the ground over and over again.

Got something to add, Cash? I press.

He exhales heavily and finally lifts his gaze to mine. *If Snow knew Malcolm was going to declare her as his mate, and she knew you were coming to watch it go down, maybe she couldn't stand up there knowing you were out here fuming. Maybe she ducked out.*

But hiding out doesn't sound like Snow. Not at all.

Pacing around the group, Rocky makes a stand behind me. *If you're gearing up to go against that assbat, you know I'm in. Haven't liked him since the first moment I met him.*

I can always count on Rocky to have my back, even if the battle isn't his to fight, and I'm thankful for it today.

Hate to say it, but I agree with Cash for once, J.D. pipes in, moving between Cash and Diesel. Snow's our new Alpha. Marrying someone like Malcolm is the right move. It stabilizes the pack. Leaves you high and dry, but there ain't shit you can do about it now. You'll find another.

I search for Snow among the packmates lined up and staring at the house. *There isn't anyone else. Not for me. And there never will be.*

The guys cough and gag, drawing the attention of the wolves around us.

Finally, Diesel sits back, sniffing the air. *If he just paid off all their debt, it sounds like a deal Snow wouldn't want to back out of.*

Something she can't, Goliath agrees, nodding quickly. *You heard Malcolm. She's his now.*

I won't accept that. Backing away from the guys, I pad toward the main house, weaving between packmates as Snow's stepmother invites other couples to the porch. *I'm going to find her with or without you guys.*

Exasperated sighs echo behind me, but when I turn around, every single one of them is on my tail. As I knew they would be. Once we're around the house and facing the front—in plain view of where I pleased Snow on the hood of Diesel's car—we split up. Rocky and Goliath search the perimeter, the forest, and then plan to circle back to the lodge to make sure Snow didn't backtrack there.

God, I wish she would...

But I get the feeling it's not going to be that simple.

Diesel and Harley head to the garage first, probably to scope out the rides while they're searching, and then will meet up with Rocky and Goliath when they're finished.

As I slip through the front door with Cash and J.D., they split off to clear the downstairs chambers, bar, kitchen, and dining room. The main house is empty, except for the staff bustling about, setting up the formal dinner that'll happen later. Glasses clink as they're carried together and placed on the white linen cloths. A few of the staff glance my way, nod and smile, and then turn their attention back to decorating the table. They're the only packmates on the estate who remain in human form, though they'll still be able to hear my mindspeak. Malcolm and Snow's stepmother are too close to the back door for me to call out for Snow. They'll hear and no doubt come inside to make sure I'm escorted out.

Let us have another declaration, I hear Snow's stepmother say from outside. If you'd like to declare your mate today, would you please step forward?

The ceremony is almost over, and then everyone will be flooding inside. I don't have much time.

With the downstairs covered, I hightail it upstairs, seeking Snow's scent.

Where are you? I call out to her without projecting my thoughts as I search relentlessly, nudging open doors and sniffing her out. *Come on, baby, lead me to you.*

But she's everywhere, in every step, every room, every turn of the hall. Her sugary-sweet scent invades my senses, overwhelming me, consuming me, until I'm dizzy from the pressure of it in my lungs.

As I come upon the door to her room, howls erupt from downstairs. Doors open and slam closed. Footsteps thunder over hardwood.

The ceremony is over.

They're coming.

Snow? I push through my mind, ramming against her door. *Are you in here?*

And then, from out of nowhere, I hear my name.

For a split second, I'm not sure I caught it at all. It was softer than a whisper. Almost a breath that formed my name by accident.

Hunter...

But when I hear it again, a caress that brushes through my head, I turn toward the sound and dart down the hall. When I think I've gone too far, I slow, listening.

Hunter...

I can't tell if the voice is coming from Snow or someone else, but I don't care. I'm running, charging down the hall, answering the call that's now pounding through my head. I make a left then another right, up a short flight of stairs that leads to a set of double doors bolted from the outside. Chains loop through the handles of both doors and come together with a crude wrought-iron lock.

Snow, I cry out, leaning against the door, listening. Her scent is everywhere, lingering on the air and tickling my nose. *Snow, it's me.*

Whimpers reverberate on the air, jolting me into action. I can't think, can't feel, as I back away and ram into the door full force. The chain rattles, shaking, as howls ricochet off the walls on the first floor.

They know I'm here, so close to getting to her.

They're coming.

What have they done?

Snow, I'm coming. I slam the entire weight of my body into the door, but it holds strong. I could shift back into human form and try to undo the bolt with my hands, but my instinct tells me that's not going to work. I need all the brute strength I can get. *Hold on, baby.*

With a growl wrenched from the deepest part of me, I take a few strides back and then charge full force, striking the door with the side of my body. The lock breaks free, dropping to the ground with a thud as the chains loosen. Frantic, I nudge them off with my nose and rush inside, stopping when I set my eyes on Snow.

She's asleep, lying on her back in the middle of a mahogany bed, her arms crossed over her chest as if she's dead.

But I can hear every quiet inhale as she sucks air into her lungs. And then, when she exhales, the air passes her lips in a soft whoosh that's so weak I can barely hear it. As I stalk closer, I can't tear my eyes away from the ashen paleness of her cheek, the fall of raven-black hair cascading around her pillow, or the blood-red color of her plush lips. Someone could have painted her there, angelic and perfect.

She couldn't have uttered my name, not in this state, but she'd called to me nonetheless. Or some part of her did.

Snow, wake up...

Nothing.

Not a twitch of movement.

As I approach the bed—the only piece of furniture in the cold room—I shift back to human form. Skin flattens over fur. Muscles shorten. My steps slow, and as I tower over her, I swear her eyelids flutter. Her lips part slowly, and a flush of color returns to her cheeks.

Hunter...

My heart clenches in answer as her primal call resonates through me. Taking her hands in mine, I lean down, hovering a breath over her lips. Down the hall, the sound of footfalls increases until shadows slant over the tiny room.

Closing my eyes, I draw a clipped breath as I brush my lips against hers. My entire body lights up, my heart calling out to hers with a force I've never known. She's stiff, her lips unmoving as I urge them apart with my own. Voices flood the room, shouting words I don't want to hear and commands I won't obey.

As arms wrap around mine and attempt to tug me away, I pinch my eyes closed and call to Snow the way she did for me. I push images through my mind—mental pictures of us—and sear them into the scorching kiss. In the kitchen closet, her leg coiled around my waist. In the forest, pressed up against a tree. In my arms, all night long. Her lips on mine, her heart beating my name.

And then, as the grip on my arms strengthens, her body arches up into mine. Her lips move, slant, softening to their pillow-like form. Fireworks of sensation blast through my body, and as I'm ripped away from Snow's bedside, her eyes flutter open.

Chapter Six

SNOW

Needles lance into my temples as I lurch upright and clutch at my pounding head. Colors blur before my eyes as a horde of people crowd into the cramped room, barking commands at one another. The racket hurts my ears and muddles my thoughts.

What's happened to me?

As I search the room, my gaze skipping from Hunter to Malcolm, to my stepmother and a few of her guards, the realization strikes me like a thunderclap. I go cold—frozen and stunned.

"You *drugged* me," I fight out, the words hurting my heart as they tear past my lips. "How could you?"

The commotion stops for a fragment of a second as all eyes turn my way. With my voice still echoing through the chamber, Hunter lurches toward my bedside. The guards grab him, wrenching his arms behind his back as they wrestle him to the ground. He squirms, fighting hard, elbowing a burly

one in the nose as he jerks his head back and slams it into another. As the pungent scent of blood, testosterone, and adrenaline flares through the room, Hunter shifts into wolf form in an explosion of thickly-corded muscle, golden fur, and protruding fangs.

"Get this brute under control," my stepmother blurts, not a trace of fear in her voice as she eyes him with disdain. "And then get him out of here."

Obedying my stepmother's command, the guards rear up, shifting into three gigantic, snarling, pissed-off wolves. Fangs bared, they edge Hunter backward until he's cornered against the wall.

"No. Let him go," I say, but my words are too soft, too weak for them to hear or care. I clear my throat and will the strength to return to my sapped muscles. "Hunter..."

He's outnumbered. Cornered. He won't get out now.

"Don't hurt him." I drag my legs over the side of the bed and shout my command with all the air I have left in my lungs. "I command you to release him."

The guards still, meeting my gaze as if they're uncertain whether to obey my stepmother or me.

"Snow, thank God you're all right," my stepmother croons, her regal mask firmly in place as she sweeps to my side. It's as if she hasn't heard a word I've said about releasing Hunter. As if she's going to brush everything that's happened under the rug.

"We were so worried about you. Your mate is here, of course." She drapes her arm around my shoulder, and when I try to jerk free, she digs her fingers into my shoulders. "Malcolm, get over here. Quickly. Snow's trembling in fear. She needs you."

Hunter growls, vibrating the floor as he charges forward, snapping at the largest guard. The two flanking him ram into his sides, bringing him to the ground, drawing a whimper from

my chest. The brawl doesn't stop Malcolm from charging over and kneeling in front of me. He takes my hands in his. I can't tear my eyes away from Hunter.

"Snow, everything is going to be all right now," Malcolm soothes, brushing his thumb over the back of my knuckles. "I'm going to get you out of here."

But the pieces are already coming together in my head, forming a clear picture of the reason he's here in the first place, of what transpired over the last few hours.

"Malcolm," I say, gaining strength, "I've had a crush on you for a long time. I was thrilled you decided to show up for this month's full moon. I thought if given the chance, we could've had something amazing."

"And you're right," he interjects quickly, squeezing my hand and shaking his head. "We do. What we have is... special."

He's attempting to silence me, but I'm not done. Not even close.

Does he not think I heard their conversation while I was knocked unconscious earlier? When he was more concerned with finding the diamond mines on our land than his future mate lying unconscious in the bed next to him? I'm pinned between a liar and a snake. Maybe Malcolm should've declared my stepmother as his mate; they would've been perfect for one another.

"Oh, it's *special* all right," I go on. "But all you wanted was—"

"Sweetheart," my stepmother interrupts, her gaze flickering to the guards eavesdropping from the corner. "Perhaps now is not the time. You can attend to these matters privately, don't you think?"

"No," I say flatly, nailing her with my glare. "How could you?"

Her mouth presses into a tight, white line. "Snow, the

doctor said you could be affected by that bug for a long while. Whatever it was, it sure had a grip on you. You were nearly dead.” The insinuation is loud and clear. If I don’t play by her rules, things will get worse. “Why don’t you lie down and let your new mate take care of you so that you can recover fully?”

She doesn’t think I’ll do it—out her in front of everyone. She doesn’t think I’m bold enough to take her on.

Yet, there it is.

My choice. My dreams can come true, or they can shatter. With one word, I can bond with a man who will give me everything I’ve always wanted. My father’s estate will remain intact, securing a sanctuary where our packmates can shift during the full moon. I can grow old here, on the land I love so much.

Before this weekend, my choice would’ve been easy. I would’ve married Malcolm and lived happily ever after managing the estate at his side.

But now, after blasting through the friend zone with Hunter, how could I ever go back? There’s no way. Not happening. And I don’t want Malcolm’s money. I’m not asking him to invest now. Going through the land, searching under our noses without saying anything was totally underhanded. I can’t trust him.

Tears burn the back of my throat as I imagine a future where I lose the estate to the bank and they sell it to the highest bidder. My father loved me more than he loved the estate. Deep down, I know the truth. He’d want me to be happy.

It still doesn’t ease the sting of failure.

“I don’t want to lie down.” I glower at my stepmother, making my choice known. “I’ve done enough of that already. You made sure of that, remember?”

“Then why don’t you take a second and pause,” she whispers, her attention flicking to Malcolm and the guards in

the room. "before you say something you'll regret."

"The only thing I regret is not standing up to you sooner," I say, my heart pounding out of my chest. "No matter what you say, or what you threaten me with, I'm not going to save this land at the expense of losing my heart."

Hunter steps struggling and peers over the raised backs of the guards. Even the air seems to still around us.

"Snow," Malcolm begins, but I cut him off.

"There are no diamonds in this land." As I speak the words, my head becomes completely clear. My senses return to their heightened state, and everything makes sense. "I hate to break it to you, but they're not here. They never were. My stepmother has been scouring every inch of our property for years and has come up empty-handed. She didn't invite you here for me, or to partner up and grow your business with the diamonds you'd find. She asked you here to get us out of debt. Period. And you were ready to do it. Pay off everything and bond with me in the hopes of finding the diamonds someday."

My stepmother scoffs, pacing a tight circle around us. I can sense her anger and hatred turning into the room like smoke, pungent and tingling my nose.

"I deserve so much more than that." I stare point-blank into Malcolm's eyes and feel nothing. Absolutely stone-cold nothing. "For that reason and so many more..."

"Don't Snow, I beg of you," my stepmother pleads as she passes behind me. "Don't do this."

"I'm withdrawing from our bond before it can be completed," I continue, "releasing you from any previous declaration made in front of the pack."

"You selfish little brat!" My stepmother roars from behind me. "You've ruined us!"

"No, *I'll* be fine," I snap, turning to face her. "I ruined *you*."

The next moments happen so fast, they're a blur—a

lightning strike of growls and howls and wolf cries unlike anything I've ever heard. If it weren't for my heightened eyesight, I wouldn't have been able to track the explosion of chaos. With an ear-piercing scream, my stepmother blasts through her human form and drops to all fours as a wolf. Malcolm backs toward the door, hands raised in surrender, as if he doesn't want anything to do with the fight, the coward. Snarling, baring her teeth, my stepmother paws at the ground and projects a thought in such a rage, I can't make it out. From the corner, Hunter attacks the guards, ramming into their sides, biting at their necks, tearing through flesh and fur.

Letting the shifting energy of the moon pulse through my veins, I gather every tendril of white-hot energy into a ball in my gut and then push outward, releasing the wolf from inside me. Skin gives way to fur as I crouch to all fours. My muscles lengthen as raw strength pulses through them, my body changing and morphing as I back away from my stepmother.

She charges before my shift is complete, clawing at my face. I dodge, lower my muzzle and swing around, rearing up at her side. Striking fast, I swipe my claws against her side, drawing blood. She roars in pain, and as she lunges toward me, mouth open, ready to sink her fangs into my neck, I meet her. Teeth clash, and our paws meet at the neck as we rise up in unison. Snarls of fury erupt from the back of her throat as my nails sink into her flesh near her ear.

As we're locked, swiping paws right over left, biting into one another's faces, one of the guards rushes in, ramming into my side. Falling to the ground, I sink my claws in deep to hold on. But I'm toppling too fast, and when I realize I've got my nails gouged into my stepmother's throat, it's too late. I can't right myself. She's coming down with me or I'm slicing a massive gash near her artery.

Yelping into a shriek, she collapses onto the ground covered in blood.

It all happens so fast. A complete blur.

Get up, I project. Get her off me.

Rather than continue his assault, the guard who charged me bites my stepmother on the back of her neck—tight enough to hold her in place, soft enough not to do any real damage—and lifts her off the floor.

From the corner of my eye, I spot Hunter pushing through the two guards facing him and rush to my side. Surprisingly, they don't follow to join in the fight or attack him as he escapes. They watch, silent and stone-faced. Malcolm does the same, his back flattened against the door, eyes wide, hands crossed in front of him—the clean-cut jeweler has probably never been in a fight in his life.

Are you all right? Hunter nudges me, his face rubbing against my neck in a loving way that sends tingles shooting through me. *God, Snow, if anything happened to you...*

I'm fine.

He would've fought for me. Died for me. No matter what happens in this life, Hunter will be there. Thinking those things—and knowing them in my heart—has my body going flush with adoration.

But I'm not finished with my stepmother yet.

Standing back, I judge her carefully. She's dangling from the mouth of one of her guards, her paws barely brushing the ground. Covered in blood—whether it's hers or mine, I can't tell—her head lolls to the side as if it's barely hanging on to the rest of her body.

Anger still surging through me, I pad closer, never tearing my eyes away from hers. *When my father married you, all I ever wanted was to be considered your daughter. I wanted you to love me as your own. Even when I knew you would never see me as anything but a spoiled child who wasn't of your bloodline, I did everything you asked. Everything. But you blamed me for our debt. Worked me harder. Put me under*

more pressure. Increased demands. And then, when your livelihood was on the line, you threatened me, drugged me, and swore to keep me in some kind of coma if I didn't do what you asked. How could you be so...so evil?

A low growl reverberates through Hunter's chest as he stands beside me. I shoot him a glance and return my attention to my stepmother. Blood trickles out of her mouth, showing the extent of her internal damage, but her eyes are lit with fire and life, and I instinctively know the injuries she's suffered won't be lethal. Even though I hate her for the things she's done to me, I'm relieved that she'll live after tonight. I wouldn't want her death on my conscience.

You had such potential, she spits through her mind, her tone turning vile. I hoped you would rule the pack unselfishly, the way your father did, putting their needs over your own. But you chose your happiness every time. Even now.

Hate and regret and disbelief steamroll through me. *I worked my ass off for the pack.*

But when it came down to it—a decision that would've saved everyone from being uprooted, what did you choose?

I grit my back teeth together.

You chose him. She looks up, glaring, and then rolls her eyes. *I did what I had to do to force your hand. What's wrong with that? You can't hate me for doing what's right for the pack.*

You lied to Malcolm to get him to come here, I scream through my thoughts, bribing him with riches that don't exist. You tried to kill me.

She nods slowly, sickly. *All for the sake of the pack. You must know how this would've benefited them in the end.*

For a split second, I entertain her statements. No one can say she wasn't going all-out to save the estate for the sake of the pack, and in the back of my mind, maybe I wish I had that kind of loyalty to them...but not this far, not this way. It's like saying people who kill bad people are simply doing what's

right for society by wiping evil off the earth. No, killing is still killing, no matter how the insane mind tries to warp it.

In the end, my father always wanted me to be happy. He wanted packmates to be able to choose their own mates, in their own time. As my heart beats strong and true, I know this is what he would've wanted. He wouldn't have wished for me to marry Malcolm to save the estate. He would've wanted me to marry for love, to set an example to the rest of the pack.

She seethes, flaring her nostrils and showing her fangs. In response, the guard holding on to her by the neck tightens his bite.

What should we do with her? one of the guards asks from behind them.

Silence stretches until I realize they're all looking to me for the answer. Feeling suddenly strange in my own skin, I lower my gaze to the floor. As the last few moments replay through my head—the fight and accusations, the threats and the way the guard is holding my stepmother prisoner now—realization cracks through me like a whip.

I didn't need an official declaration in front of the pack. I challenged the reigning Alpha and emerged victorious from the fight.

With my mother's royal blood surging through my veins, I'm able to rule.

They're waiting for your command, Hunter says, his voice like a caress through my mind, *Alpha.*

His final words hit hard, like a gong in my chest, and I know that everything is going to be okay. Better than okay. It's going to be perfect.

Chapter Seven

SNOW

Leaning over my bathroom sink, I let the cool water fill my palms before I splash it on my face. When I glance up into the mirror, Hunter is watching my reflection, a smirk curling his gorgeous lips.

“You’re not going to talk into that thing again, are you?” he asks, coughing to cover up a laugh.

A blush heats my cheeks. “You heard me before?”

“Kind of hard not to.”

“Well,” I say, drying my face and tossing the towel. “What do you think I should wish for this time?”

“How about a happily-ever-after that involves crazy-hot, rock-your-world sex with a stud named Hunter?”

If I hadn’t experienced the last few days firsthand, I might’ve thought they were a dream. Never in my wildest ones would I have imagined my stepmother would cross the line the way she did. That I’d become Alpha this way, in a fight rather than a simple, orderly announcement. That I would’ve

turned down Malcolm Taylor for Hunter, my best friend in the world. But we're so much more than that now.

"Sounds like heaven," I answer, but before I can turn to face him, his arms are around my waist and he's drawing me against his chest.

"Snow, don't get me wrong," he says, staring into my eyes through the reflection, "I'm never letting you go, but —"

"But *what*?" Keeping my back against him, I crane around and plant a kiss on his cheek. "You better not be getting cold feet about bonding with me."

"No, never." He nuzzles my neck, sending chills scattering up my spine. "I just wonder if you're ever going to regret choosing me and splitting up the pack. I hate to think I'm the reason you're losing your home."

"Listen..." I spin in his arms and cup his square jaw in my hands. "At the end of the day, I can honestly say that even though I failed, I did everything short of selling my soul to save this place. Who knows? Maybe one of your lodges will make a suitable place for future festivities. All I know is they'll be fine. As for me, I couldn't be happier because *you're* my home now, Hunter."

"And you're mine, love." He pierces me with the adoration glimmering in his sapphire eyes. "Before we complete our bond, there's something I have to give you."

I frown, confused, as I follow him into my bedroom. The room is dim, lit by soft auras of candlelight, and warmth spreads from the crackling hearth. Digging into his duffel bag, Hunter pulls out a small wooden box.

My eyes go wide at the sight—at the promise—of what's to come. There's only one thing that comes in a box like that. I feel foolish for hoping, but he winks at me, and now my chest is tight, and the air won't come.

"Hunter..."

"It's not from me, not really."

My heart does a flip-flop. "What do you mean?"

"It's from your father." He holds the box clutched tightly in his hand as he strokes the back with his thumb. "Before he died, he gave this to me, and asked me to give it to you today, your birthday, after you become Alpha."

"Why would he give this to you?" I whisper, staring at the box. "Why not my stepmother?"

"After what we witnessed earlier, it's clear she can't be trusted." He shrugs his big, strong shoulders. "Maybe deep down he knew it all along."

"I don't know what to say." I'm hollow, aching, wanting desperately to know what my father would've wanted me to have and so touched by the fact that Hunter was the one who'd been keeping it safe for me all these years. Even back then, my father knew he could trust Hunter. And now, I can trust him with my heart. "What is it?"

"I don't know. I've never opened it."

Slowly, with trembling hands, I unhinge the box and expose a diamond. It's not a ring, but a giant, uncut stone. The biggest I've ever seen.

"Wow, it's gorgeous," I breathe, clutching my chest. "Wait, what is that?"

A tiny slip of paper inside the box catches my eye. It looks like a tag, or a scrap of cardboard torn from the bottom of the box. But it's not the actual paper that has my eyes narrowing to see more clearly. It's the ink bleeding through it—the familiar loop of an "S," inscribed the way my father used to scrawl the first letter of my name.

"What?" He lifts up the box to peer at it from underneath.

"There's something inside."

Taking the box from Hunter, I lift the satin pillow that cushioned the diamond and hand it to him. And then, pinching the corner of the paper, I remove it and unfold carefully. The writing is small and neat, as if each letter had been composed

with careful consideration. As I unfold the final flap, the air catches in my throat.

"Snow," I read aloud, my voice strained by tears, "you are so much like your mother and rule from your heart. Don't ever stop. When you find your mate, use this to build a bright future with him. Love, your father."

I look up into Hunter's eyes, but his attention is honed in on the scrap of paper clutched in my trembling hand.

"Look on the back." Taking my hand in his, he turns it around so I can see what's written on the flipside. "Does that look like a map to you?"

"It does, actually. It's—the path leading to your cabin." I know it well. Squinting, I struggle to make out the shapes. "And another path that leads to the—is that the hot spring?"

"Where we made love."

I nod, agreeing. "But why would he want me to know where to find the spring?"

And then I see it. On the corner. A cluster of three diamonds covered by what looks like a stick-figure shed. Two lines for walls. Two slanted over the top to make a roof.

A mine.

"Snow," Hunter says, drawing out his words, "is there the smallest possibility that your father didn't trust your stepmother with the location of the diamond mines?"

I nod quickly because I can't talk, can't make sense of what this could mean.

"He wanted you to have everything—just you." He wraps me up in his arms and swings me around, my feet flying out behind me. "This is your inheritance, Snow. He left you a way to save the estate."

I don't dare hope what he's saying is true, but as I brush my fingers over the uncut diamond, I know it is. I feel it deep down inside me.

As I meet Hunter's eyes and kiss him square on the

mouth, a flutter of happiness flares through me. “I can save our home, and the pack, and” — a deep, relieved sigh escapes me — “everything is going to work out. But wait...”

Hunter was on board with my plan to move three weeks out of the year, using one of his lodges as a safe haven during the full moon, but now that I’m able to save the estate, I want —

“Shh,” he says, gently grabbing my head and tangling his fingers in my hair. “I can hear your thoughts whirling in there. I want to be here, with you, for the rest of my life. I’ll have to take care of this lodge in Iceland because I can’t leave the developers hanging, but after that, it’s you and me. I’ve been all over this world, searching for all kinds of adventures, but my greatest is you, Snow. It’s your love, and I don’t ever want to lose that.”

As I melt inside, he lifts me up, cradling me in his strong arms as he marches to the bed and tosses me onto a giant mound of pillows. I squeal in sheer bliss and before I forget, set the paper on the nightstand beside the bed.

Hunter kicks off his pants and peels his shirt from his chiseled body, and then crawls over the bed. He eyes me hungrily, and his muscles flex and strain as he creeps closer, the heat from his body radiating through the space between us. Squirming in anticipation, I strip off my dress and toss it to the floor and wait with bated breath for his body to cover mine.

How is it possible that Hunter wants to bond with me? The playboy of the pack wants me. Forever. I can hardly believe it.

Breath hitching in my throat, I settle back on the pillows as he slinks up my body, kissing my calves, inner thighs, and — oh God — the juncture between my legs.

“Hunter,” I say, and then suck in a breath that sounds like a hiss. “I can’t believe you’re mine.”

He rears up, presses his hips against mine, sheathing himself inside me in one long, slow, glorious stroke. "All ten inches, baby."

God, yes.

And then he smiles, lighting me up as he thrusts in and out, in a rhythm that drives me wild. Moving beneath him, I plant my feet to arch my hips up. He groans, the pads of his fingers grazing my thigh before grabbing my rear.

"I love you, Hunter." Running my hands up and down his back, I press him down over me so I can take in everything. The heady, masculine scent of him. The thick length of his cock as he drives deep inside me. "Forever."

"I love you, too." He draws back slightly, his gaze sliding over my features in wonder. Ghosting his hands over my hair, he studies my eyes, my nose, my mouth, as if I'm the most beautiful woman he's ever seen in his life. "I always have. But I denied it for so long and wasted so much time because I didn't think there was any way I deserved someone as good as you."

"You deserve everything and more." I say on a moan as he swells inside me. "All I have to give is yours. Take it—take *me*."

He captures my mouth on a primal growl that calls to something deep within me, and when he slips his tongue past my lips, I lose myself completely. Every move is heightened, his every thrust bringing me closer to the violent crest of ecstasy. With each pound of his hips against mine, each languid swirl of his tongue against my cheek, my body comes alive. Blood roars through my ears as he braces his weight on one hand and reaches between our bodies with the other. And then, as my clit throbs, aching for his touch, he swipes his fingers through my heat. I buck at the contact, the climax exploding through me like a firework.

"Snow..." He goes rigid over me, his muscles tensing.

“You’re gorgeous and, fuck, you’re...”

With a roar of possession and gripping need, fangs drop from his gums. He smudges a wet kiss across my neck. His cock thrusts slowly through my heat, unwinding me, distracting me. For an instant, pain flickers through me where his fangs sink in. But then it’s gone, and I’m fevered with the thought of being branded—marked—by this magnificent male.

“You’re...” He rises up on his hands and sheaths himself deep in my heat, all the way to the hilt. “...*mine*.”

Pleasure spears through me as his cock pulses, filling me with his release. Gripping his shoulders, I draw him down over me, skin to skin, heart to heart. When the orgasm wanes, and his rhythm slows to a halt, he rolls beside me, pulling me into the nook between his arm and his chest. I melt against him with a sigh, relishing the warmth and safety provided by his embrace.

“In your wildest dreams,” he says, breathing heavy into my hair as he strokes his hands across my back, “did you ever think we’d wind up together this way?”

“Maybe,” I whisper, lifting my eyes to his, “once upon a time.”

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New York Times and *USA Today* bestselling author Kristin Miller writes sweet and sassy contemporary romance, romantic suspense, and steamy paranormal romance of all varieties. Kristin has degrees in psychology, English, and education, and taught high school and middle school English before crossing over to a career in writing. She lives in Northern California with her alpha male husband and their two children. You can usually find her in the corner of a coffee shop, laptop in front of her and mocha in hand, using the guests around her as fuel for her next book.

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If you love erotica, one-click these hot Scorched releases...

HOUSE RULES

a *Dossier* novella by Cathryn Fox

I know Kennedy Lane is hands off, but I want her. I always have. She might have been too young for me back in the day. Now, not so much. Hands off leads to hands on after a private dance, and while Kennedy spends the weekend pretending to be someone she isn't, I know full well who she is. And I'm not quite ready to let her go.

PAYBACK

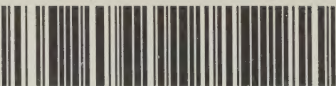
a *Viking Bastards* novel by Christina Phillips

I don't fuck girls who work for me, but as soon as Amelia turns those big green eyes on me I know she's trouble. I can't keep my hands off her, and the *almost-but-not-quite-sex* we share in the kitchen is the hottest thing I've ever had. Except she calls it quits, before we've even started. She's all I can think about. Until I find out who she is and what she really wants. She's after payback, but there's no way she's going to get it. No way in hell...

THE SEDUCTION OF VISCOUNT VICE

a *Fallen* novella by Nicola Davidson

Fallen co-owner Lord Iain 'Vice' Vissen is dedicated to performing in the pleasure club's hedonistic shows. Born an earl's daughter but now a seamstress, Mairi is helping open a superior pleasure club to Fallen. But when she discovers her main rival is Iain, the man she loved beyond reason and was forced to abandon, she's caught in a web of lies, secrets, and raw, scorching passion that time hasn't dimmed...



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Mirror Mirror on the wall, for which man will fair Snow White fall? The playboy who stole her heart, or the billionaire who will give her anything her heart desires. She must choose—and now—to claim her role as alpha of her pack.

SNOW'S SEDUCTION

My wicked stepmother has come up with a plan to save our pack: seduce a rich jeweler. When he agrees to bond with me and make me his forever, we'll be golden. Not such a bad deal, considering he's crazy hot. Except, I'm not a temptress. It's a good thing my best friend, Hunter, has come back into the area. He'll teach me the rules of seduction, but that isn't all I'm learning...

SNOW'S SUBMISSION

I used to be sweet and innocent...but that was until Hunter put his hands on me. Now, my body craves his, and we've crossed the point of no return. My stepmother demands that I seduce a rich jeweler to secure our fortune, and under normal circumstances, I wouldn't mind. He's hotter than hell. There's one problem: now that I have Malcolm's attention, I'm not sure I want to leave Hunter's arms.

SNOW'S SURRENDER

I must choose between Hunter, my best friend turned lover, and Malcolm, who wants to pleasure me senseless. There's too much at stake to screw up now. If I choose Hunter, the pack will lose the only home it's ever known. Selfishness isn't exactly the beaming of an Alpha, and I long to rule someday. But if I make the selfish choice, the one that will save us all, I'll be betraying my



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